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KINGFISHER.

WOODLAND, FIELD AND SHORE

WILD NATURE DEPICTED WITH PEN AND CAMERA

BY

OLIVER G. PIKE

AUTHOR OF 'IN BIRD-LAND WITH FIELD-GLASS AND CAMERA,' ETC.

WHINCHAT'S NEST

WITH TWO COLOURED PLATES AND 101 PHOTOGRAPHS OF BIRDS, ANIMALS, AND INSECTS, TAKEN DIRECT FROM NATURE BY THE AUTHOR

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Preface

IN *Woodland, Field, and Shore* I have endeavoured to describe and picture the every-day life of our British wild birds and their homes in the country side. Birds have not had exclusive attention, however; something about animals, insects, and flowers is also given where these are found to be of interest. For the most part my bird-land pictures have been obtained in the counties near to London; others were secured farther afield, especially many of those relating to shore birds. Generally my descriptions of country scenes and incidents have been written in the open air while I have been waiting with my camera for subjects, or, at other times, when actually rambling in the woodlands, the fields, or on the shore.

People who have not practised birdsnesting with a camera can have no adequate idea of the time and patience needed to secure a set of pictures such as those which illustrate this volume. The photographs of birds alone represent nearly one hundred hours of

waiting in hiding, not to mention many other days spent in vainly trying to photograph the owners of other nests which illustrate the following pages.

Birds have been friends of mine since my earliest days, and I am never happier than when roaming about among their wild homes with field-glass and camera. My notes and observations on their habits have been taken at first hand from Nature, and at all hours of the day and night.

In the collection of my photographs illustrating this book, I have to thank the following gentlemen for help and encouragement very kindly given: The Right Hon. Sir Charles W. Dilke, Bart., M.P.; John Ford, Esq., J.P., of Enfield Old Park; Richard Westrop, Esq., formerly of South Lodge, Enfield Chase; Stanley Boys, Esq., formerly of Upper Warlingham; Captain Otto Gurlitt, and F. W. Drake, Esq., of Winchmore Hill. In addition, I have been indebted to various members of the North London Natural History Society, and a number of other friends, who are also bird-lovers, in the southern counties of England.

I shall always be glad to hear of nests of rare birds; or of opportunities for photographing birds at any time and in any part of the British Isles.

O. G. P.

Winchmore Hill, Middlesex.
March, 1901.

A HAUNT OF THE REDSHANK (LOW TIDE).

Introduction

BY THE REV. J. MONRO GIBSON, D.D.

WHAT the painter does for the individual scene when he puts soul-tints into it and makes it smile and speak and open its heart to us, Mr. Pike does for universal Nature. With light and pleasant touches he shows its beauty in all its varying aspects, throughout the changing seasons; for though he does not dwell on the winter, he assigns a chapter to the passing of it, and does not let it pass without disclosing its peculiar charm. He loves all that God has made, and has found it well worth while to spend hours at a time in

patiently watching, and accurately recording, the doings of some of the humblest denizens of woodland, field, and shore. The birds are his peculiar delight, and before we have read many pages we are in love both with them and with him. We can fully sympathise with his eagerness to get a shot at them—with his camera.

'The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that take pleasure therein.' The pity is that in this busy age these 'all' are so few. Our hope is that a book like this will greatly increase their numbers. Our great classic on the subject, *The Natural History of Selborne*, has of necessity followed other classics to the library of the reader and the scholar; but a simple little volume like this should reach a very much larger constituency; and if my hopes are realised, it will stir the love of Nature in many a heart, be a choice companion in many a ramble, open many an eye to Nature's loveliness, and waken many an ear to hear her melodies and harmonies, and above all kindle that spirit of adoration which is the soul's loftiest exercise, and supply that touch of tender interest which is the fount of intercession; for true it is that

> 'He prayeth best who loveth best,
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.'

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Woodland, Field, and Shore

I

Birdsnesting with a Camera

BLACK-HEADED GULL.

BIRDSNESTING with a camera has now become so popular with amateur photographers and bird lovers that some remarks on how best to 'shoot' our game may be useful to novices.

It matters not what size the camera used may be. A good, sharply focussed small negative makes as good a picture when enlarged as larger ones taken direct. Some of the most effective bird-pictures I have seen were taken with a quarter-plate camera. Perhaps the best all-round size is a half-plate. The camera should be one that can be focussed at the back, while the front is fixed; for nothing is more annoying than to find that after say an hour being

occupied in fixing the apparatus before a nest, the whole has to be moved farther away. This will often happen if a camera is used that has to be focussed by racking out the front.

The lens should be one of large aperture, and possessing great depth of focus. The one I like best out of many I have tried is the double anastigmat, new series, made by C. P. Goerz. This combines the most extreme rapidity with splendid covering powers at the largest aperture—F. 5·5, and is a really satisfactory all-round lens for naturalist photographers. With a Goerz double anastigmat working at F. 6·8, I have obtained some perfect photographs of flying birds with an exposure of $\frac{1}{300}$ of a second on a dull February day.

It is very necessary that a silent shutter should be used. One working behind the lens should be chosen; but the best plan is to have it inside the camera, if possible, as then there is no likelihood of a timid bird being scared by any movement. The most efficient shutter for time and slow exposures is the Thornton-Pickard time and instantaneous pattern: if one of these is fitted inside the camera, with a thick padding of velvet between the shutter and camera front, there will hardly be any perceptible noise when the shutter is released. Mine has been in almost daily use for four years, and works as well now as when I first

had it. The majority of bird photographers make it a rule to give very fast exposures, but this is a great mistake. Do not set your focal-plane shutter at $\frac{1}{300}$ of a second when photographing an innocent little Blue Tit or Robin. The former is a very restless bird, yet if a perfectly silent shutter is used an exposure of $\frac{1}{15}$ of a second will give more perfect results. I have photographed one walking

BLACK-HEADED GULLS LEAVING THE WATER.
(EXPOSURE $\frac{1}{300}$ SECOND.)

along a branch with an exposure of about $\frac{1}{10}$ of a second. With a very rapid exposure a hard negative is produced, unless the plate is very carefully developed; and really there is no need to set a silent shutter at a high speed. Where the shutter makes enough noise to startle a bird, an exposure of not less than $\frac{1}{200}$ of a second must be given. Of course the foregoing remarks do not refer to flying birds, in the case of which an exposure of $\frac{1}{300}$ of a second is the slowest that

should be used. Small birds require a much more rapid exposure than large ones, for the smaller the bird the quicker the wings are moved. A focal-plane shutter must be used for such subjects; there are many in the market now, and I have used several, but none in my opinion are as good as the 'Anschutz.' For ease of altering the slit, reliability in exposure, and silent working this is the best. It is annoying to have a shutter 'go wrong' at the critical moment, and unless a good make is used this is likely to happen.

Undoubtedly the most useful contrivance for bird work is a 'gun-camera.' In my recently published book, *In Bird-Land*, I give a description of the one I use. The most important point in mine, which I made for the most part myself, is being able to focus the object while the sensitive plate is in position ready for exposure. This result is obtained by an arrangement of mirrors inside the camera. At the instant of exposure these are put out of action, allowing the light from the lens to pass through, and at the same time a focal plane shutter passes across the plate. With these mirrors a lens of any focus can be used, and one is not compelled to use a special lens, as is the case with gun-cameras used by some other bird photographers. A gun-stock is utilised as being the most convenient thing for the camera to rest upon.

There are many ways of releasing the shutter. The pneumatic tube is the most popular; but one great objection to this is the time the air-wave takes to travel along a lengthy piece of tube, so that the bird is found to be in a different position when the plate is developed from what it was when the ball was pressed. If the ball and tube are perfectly air-tight, this can be overcome by filling the tube with air so that the shutter is almost released; then, if the ball is screwed on with this pressure in the tube, the slightest pinch of the ball will set off the shutter. The tube can be filled by pressing the ball and then pinching the tube just above it, so preventing the air from returning. If the ball is now taken off and allowed to fill with air, and screwed on again, two charges of air are in the tube instead of one. Another plan is to have a small hole in the ball and to place a finger over this when it is squeezed; then, by preventing the air from returning in the way mentioned, the ball can be refilled without taking it off. I have exposed plates in this way with a great length of tubing.

Another method is to use string. This is a capital way of exposing the plates, as any length can be used, the only objection being that the shutter has to be outside the camera. I have used about one hundred and fifty yards of string successfully in a large field. It is rather annoying, however, when

a horse or a cow insists on feeding near, and by touching the string sets off the shutter. I once had a horse get confusedly mixed up with such a string-connection, the result being that the cord was broken and the plate exposed.

I have now overcome all objections raised against pneumatic, string, and other connections. My friend Mr. Seamer and myself have made an electric

SONG-THRUSH, PHOTOGRAPHED BY MEANS OF ELECTRICITY.

release. It had been my desire for some time to have such a thing, but it is only recently that I have made it a success. There are great possibilities in store for bird photographers who use electricity, and no one who engages in this work will be able to afford to do without it, if he wishes to get the best pictures of our wildest birds. Any

length of wire can be used, and the most important characteristic of the electric release is that the exposure is made the instant the button is pressed, so that no time is lost, as is the case with string or pneumatic connections. I have now perfected my shutter, so that a bird practically takes its own photograph by means of electricity. Food is placed on a branch, or on the ground, by way of attraction, and when a bird alights near, the wires are connected by the bird's weight and the exposure is made. Several good pictures have been secured in this way. I have also another convenient arrangement for placing in the nests of birds, so that when the owner returns and sits on her eggs, she will also

A BLUE-TIT WHICH PHOTOGRAPHED ITSELF.

unconsciously connect the two wires, and so expose the plate. For very timid birds, which are difficult to approach, this will be a wonderful aid in obtaining their pictures. I am quite sure all bird photographers who use this new device of mine will be satisfied with the results.

By an arrangement of wires I hope to secure photographs of some of our wild animals and nocturnal birds. Many of these leave their holes or other places of hiding and feed during the night. In the case of animals the wires will be placed in their 'runs,' or food put in certain places to attract them, and when the animal passes this spot it will first connect two wires which will open the shutter by means of the electric release, and then a charge of special magnesium powder will be fired and the shutter will close. All this will be unconsciously performed by the animal. People who have not much time at their disposal, and who want to secure photographs of birds at their nests, or feeding their young, will be able to get such pictures without waiting. The camera may be put in position in the morning, and when the photographer returns in the evening from his work he will probably find the plate exposed and have a good picture of the bird. If a bird were to sit on its nest for, say an hour, there would be a great waste of electricity, and the release on the shutter

would become heated. To prevent this difficulty a piece of very thin wire is fastened to the accumulator, and when the wires are connected this melts and so breaks the circuit. The electric release can be fitted to almost any make of shutter by Messrs. Seamer Bros., of Enfield.

WHINCHAT'S NEST.

A follower of this sport has much in common with a scout: he must endeavour to get near his 'enemy' without being seen,

or so to approach as not to cause alarm. If the aim is to get a picture of a bird on its nest, it is as well a few days beforehand to place a heap of rubbish in the place where the camera is to be hidden, otherwise the bird will probably be scared by an obstruction so near its home. My own experience proves that it is better for the operator not to be with his camera unless there is a good natural hiding-place near. A camera covered over will sometimes make a formidable-looking heap, and this is quite enough to keep many birds from their nest, and more so if the naturalist hides with his apparatus.

A cloth about forty inches square, khaki-colour on one side and dull green on the other, is a good thing to carry as a focussing cloth. It can be used to cover the camera before hiding the whole with weeds, rubbish, etc. The khaki side will be found the most useful to use in winter, as it harmonises with the dried grasses and dead plant stalks, the green being more useful in spring and summer. Of course when the camera is hidden near a nest on the ground in this way, the tripod is dispensed with, a small mound of earth or a few sticks being used instead. When wanting to photograph a nest in a tree, the tripod should first be taken up and fixed as near as possible in the position desired; the camera can then be

fastened on. By doing this much time will be saved, as well as ruffling of temper: a heavy

PHOTOGRAPHING GOLDFINCH'S NEST WITH AN IMPROVISED TRIPOD.

camera with tripod attached is a difficult thing to fasten to a swaying tree.

Several photographers have asked what plates I

use. For all my work I use Cadett plates. I have no hesitation in saying that the Cadett Special Rapid is the best plate in the market for general bird photography. For photographing nests, birds feeding their young, etc., I use Cadett Special Rapid; and for more rapid work, such as flying birds, Cadett Lightning. A changing bag is better and less bulky than a number of slides: one very soon becomes accustomed to changing plates by touch.

A very necessary thing for bird photographers to have, is a pair of good field-glasses; without these it is hard to see when a bird is in the right position, when one is some distance from the camera. I like the prismatic binoculars better than the ordinary pattern of field glass; one great advantage being that a very high power and large field are obtained in an instrument no larger than a pair of opera glasses. With my glasses—the Goerz Triëder-Binocular No. 30, 9×, I have been able to distinguish sea-birds on their nests two and a half miles away; at a distance of a quarter of a mile a bird the size of a Sparrow can be recognised. No better aid for observing such far-away objects can be obtained or desired.

A love for sport is inbred in the English people, and those who have photographed birds can testify that this work is a very exciting sport at times. Who does not remember his first gun, and the

feelings of delight with which he explored the fields, intent on slaughtering the first luckless bird which crossed his path, just 'to see how it would kill.' And then, if we happened to 'drop' our game at the first shot, how satisfied we were with our new weapon, and how keenly were future days anticipated with our gun! Feelings akin to these are experienced by the bird photographer when, after a lengthy stalk with his gun-camera, he at last succeeds in obtaining a picture of a bird which has been patiently followed. The fascination of thus hunting with a camera grows upon one; and a day with field-glass and camera is as eagerly looked forward to as a good day's sport with guns and dogs on 'the glorious first.' The modern naturalist crawling stealthily through a thick reed-bed or woodland copse, equipped with his camera, is only following that instinctive love of sport which characterised the ancient Briton as he stole towards his wary game, with bow and arrow, in the virgin forests of England.

One of the chief things which bird photographers must learn to put up with is disappointment; but then, with patience and perseverance, success is sure to come; and when the wariness of a shy bird has been overcome, and a good picture is obtained, disappointments are more than counter-balanced by success. If we even return without

one negative, the day has not been wasted; for the countryside always offers something to see. Especially when lying hidden waiting to photograph a bird, we see more of the ways of our wild feathered friends than when wandering in lanes and fields.

It is well for all beginners who take to birds-nesting with a camera not to go into the fields expecting to return with photographs that will 'stagger humanity.' In such a case they will probably come back disappointed, and give up the work in disgust. Be satisfied with small results at first, and better and more valuable pictures will follow in due course, in proportion as more is learnt about the haunts and homes of our wild British birds.

II

Some Birds of the Shore

ON some parts of the south coast of England, the sea has been gradually, and in some instances much more rapidly, receding for very many years. As the water slowly, but surely, falls back, the waves leave a wide barren tract of shingle. Villages which at one time were only a short distance from the rolling waves are now found several miles inland, the case being similar to what has occurred in regard to ancient sites on the shores of the Mediterranean. Even lighthouses, which are quite modern buildings, are in some cases several hundred yards distant from the billows which of old were wont to wash around their base.

Let readers picture in their minds a wide area of flat land, covered as far as the eye can reach with stones, washed and so worn round by the action of water countless ages ago. Dotted about this expanse are here and there little patches of green; and, on closer inspection, these prove to be

clumps of sea-holly. In other places, but much more widely separated, are small groups of furze bushes, the yellow flowers giving a brighter or more enlivening aspect to the otherwise monotonous scene. With the exception of these, and a few straggling roots of sea-campion, and occasionally a small patch of half-starved looking grass, there is nothing to be seen but stones. It is a desert on a smaller scale than the Sahara, relieved in places by oases, and with the unceasing music of the wild waves going on beyond.

This is not quite the kind of ground which one would expect visitors or naturalists to frequent; but, in point of fact, the majority of our most famous ornithologists have visited this stony waste in order to study the habits of one of the most rare of British breeding birds—the Kentish Plover.

It is with no little difficulty that an ordinary landsman can walk about this rough surface, or ancient bottom of the sea, especially when one is laden with a heavy camera and its necessary appliances. The fishermen of this part of the coast have overcome difficulties in regard to locomotion, however, by using what they expressively call *back-stays*. These are made of pieces of board about eight inches long and five inches wide. The corners of one end are rounded, while a loop of leather

is placed over the board about three inches from that end; the boot is slipped under this, and by shuffling forward a man accustomed to back-stays can progress over the shingle with comparative ease. The exercise is somewhat awkward to a novice, however, and is especially so at first. Thus, when a ridge of stones has to be crossed, he will often, just when nearly on the summit, find himself discomfited by his back-stays sliding down again. Practice alone makes perfect in such walking. Then, when a number of people are walking together with this novel kind of foot-gear, the general effect is an indescribable noise. First there is the rolling of the stones as one foot is pushed forward, and then the heel of the boot coming down with a flap on to the board as the other foot is made to follow. Owing to this peculiar action and the noise thus made, we suggested that 'flappers' might be a more appropriate name than back-stays for such an ingenious contrivance. Such, then, is this ancient ocean floor, and such those who laboriously traverse its difficult surface.

On this great flat, or sea of shingle, many species of birds are found to have their nests, and here they rear their broods. The greater part of these, however, really build no nest at all; they merely lay their eggs in a slight depression in the

stones, and in such an exposed situation sit their time. It is also a fact that the eggs of such birds are not readily distinguished from their strange surroundings; and on this account are very difficult to find. I found that it was almost impossible to discover them by mere searching; the more successful plan is to lie down on the shingle, and with field-glass at hand, to wait patiently for any movement which might take place in the vicinity. Once or twice a hare roused false hopes as it slowly passed along on the stones

On a cold spring day we were lying behind a small clump of sea-holly waiting, and in hope that a Norfolk Plover might in time make its appearance. We were sure that a nest of this species was not far away, as our guide, Mr. Austen, had seen a bird near to the spot. The place where we expected to see the bird was about one hundred yards on one side. We waited a long time, however, and did not see it, but on our rising and standing above the bush a Norfolk Plover was seen to leave its nest, and then, with head bent low, to run swiftly away. Not noticing the bird or its actions, we watched the place which it had left, and walking forward, were at last rewarded by finding the nest shown in my illustration. When we were looking at the two handsomely marked eggs the Plover herself was seen far off running along a ridge of

NORFOLK PLOVER'S NEST.

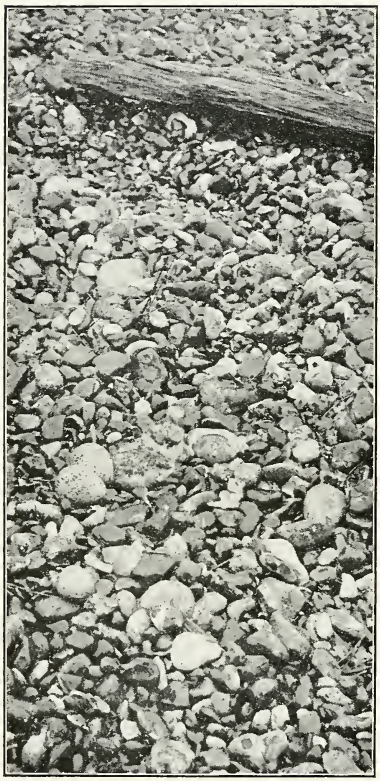
stones, as it seemed, against the sky-line. The Norfolk Plover is a large-sized bird, measuring about sixteen inches in length, and when swiftly on the move seems to remind one of a miniature Ostrich. The eggs were laid in a hollow in the shingle, near a group of furze bushes, and it seemed as if a foundation of dead furze wood had been collected to form a slight nest—although, as a rule, they are laid on the bare shingle. My photograph shows these pieces of wood, and they look as if they had been arranged by the bird, for they all point inwards and form a ring round the eggs. The two eggs, slightly over two inches in length, were of a yellow-brown ground colour, boldly marked with deep umber blotches and pale grey under-markings.

When darkness envelopes the land a nervous person might be seriously disconcerted by hearing many loud and weird calls resembling the cry of *cour-li, cour-li.* These are no other than the notes of the Norfolk Plover or Stone-Curlew; and it will readily be believed they have scared many persons on dark nights, while they have also given rise to sundry superstitious opinions and reports among the country folk of that part of the coast where they are most commonly heard. The cry is heard chiefly at night, and when the moon is shining brightly they are more noisy. Several times I

heard one cry during sunlight, although this is not usual.

The Ringed Plover is a much smaller bird than the Stone-Curlew, but is very much more interesting to an ornithologist, as it more readily allows a near approach. We found a nest containing two eggs and two young near a piece of wreckage cast up by the sea. We were making for a small hut on the shore when one of us trod on something soft, and discovered, too late to save its life, that it was a young Ringed Plover: fortunately the eggs and the other young one escaped. If that is possible, the young brood really resemble their stony surroundings even more than the eggs are found to do. The fledglings are pretty, fluffy little creatures, and being very timid make an effort to crawl away as soon as any one approaches. While we were setting up our camera, one of the parent birds was seen to be running towards us, and then pretended to be badly wounded, in hope of attracting us farther away from the nest. As we did not appear to take much notice, she ran a little nearer, and then laid herself on the ground with one wing hanging apparently useless, as if broken. Next she got up and ran round us in an excited state, all the time uttering a little plaintive cry, *pu-li*. Her mate arrived from somewhere, and joined her in these determined endeavours to attract us from their home.

I have photographed nests in all kinds of difficult positions—at the tops of trees, on cliffs, and in deep water—but never have I experienced so much trouble in order to obtain a good picture, as when photographing the nest of the Ringed Plover. This was mainly owing to wind and rain. The eggs were laid not very far from the shore, and a strong gale was blowing from the sea. Great waves were dashing in on the shingle and sending showers of spray in all directions; and, added to all this, a heavy storm-cloud was also coming up, which made the light unfavourable, and the picture consequently needed long exposure.



EGGS AND YOUNG OF RINGED PLOVER.

We were obliged to hold the camera, otherwise it would without doubt have been blown away. The legs of the tripod were driven into the shingle as far as was possible, and one held on so as to try and steady it. Two of our party stood on the windward side and shielded the camera by holding a cloth to catch the wind, and all three standing shoulder to shoulder waited for a lull in the gale which might admit of an exposure being given. At last the lull came, and a picture was obtained, but not before the rain commenced to pour down in torrents. Luckily an inviting fishing hut stood near at hand; and in that we took shelter until the storm had spent its force.

Near the small town on the margin of the shingle there is a large military camp. The great plain stretching away from this settlement on three sides offers good facilities for most effective artillery practice. It is not an uncommon thing to come upon large holes, showing where shells have struck and exploded. One might reasonably suppose that the constant firing of heavy guns, with their thunderous reports, would have the natural effect of frightening all birds away from the entire neighbourhood; but this is not the case. When certain kinds of birds have chosen a place for nesting, it takes a very great deal of inconvenience and alarm to keep them from laying their eggs

on their selected site. Two years ago a Norfolk Plover laid her two eggs, and successfully reared the brood, within one hundred and twenty yards of a target at which several shells were fired daily. To judge by the large holes in the shingle which the exploding shells had made, there must have been no slight commotion near this Stone-Curlew's nest.

A few pairs of Redshanks breed on this barren plain; we were fortunate enough in finding one nest in a low clump of furze. A piece of shell weighing several pounds was lying within a few inches of the eggs, and this is plainly seen in the picture. In the centre of the four eggs was a stone which had worked itself through the thin layer of grasses forming the bottom of the nest.

The Redshank always brings to my mind a certain February evening on the mud flats of the Essex coast. We were waiting with our guns on the banks of a creek for wild ducks. It was low tide at the time, and the crisp frosty air had given the shining mud a thin layer of ice. Flocks of Curlew kept flying past us down the creek, plainly discernible in the brilliant moonlight, uttering their weird cries. Redshanks, however, were the most attractive, with their musical whistle, which was repeatedly uttered. At intervals the ducks came over, sometimes out of range; but a well imitated

quacking brought them towards us, and the loud reports of the guns echoed down the creek away to the sea, and then rolled back again in a muffled murmur. It was like living in a new world to

REDSHANK'S NEST, WITH A PIECE OF SHELL ON THE LEFT.

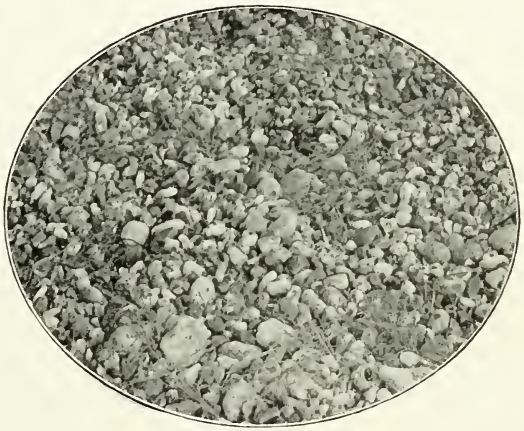
find oneself in such a place so soon after leaving the streets of London. Here, beneath the star-strewn heavens, perfect stillness and harmony reigned, the silent brilliance of the winter night being disturbed only by the wild cries of night

birds or the reports of guns as the ducks came over. There is a fascination in such sport that is only known to those who have tried it, and which cannot be expressed in writing.

On different parts of the shingle there are telegraph poles with wires connecting the various military stations, and underneath these wires dead birds are often found. These have fallen victims to the appliances of our modern civilisation. In foggy weather they fly against these wires with such fatal force as sometimes to cut off a wing or otherwise maim themselves. We picked up a Redshank with its head missing; and the unfortunate bird was lying about thirty yards from the wires. Such mishaps afford some idea of the swiftness of the ordinary flight of such birds. The wing of a Common Tern was also found, and Austen mentioned that he had seen Terns with both legs cut off, others with one wing missing.

As previously mentioned, this large stretch of shingle beach is the breeding haunt of the Kentish Plover. On the average only about fifteen pairs successfully rear their broods during each season. A very high price is given by collectors for a clutch of these Plovers' eggs; but, owing to the great difficuty in discovering them, the birds are happily not at present in any danger of being exterminated. I am pleased to be able to say

that last spring (1900) both the Kentish Plover and Little Tern were on the increase, more young being reared than in previous seasons. What collectors need to realise is, that it is a national loss, and not a mere sentimental grievance, for such birds to become extinct as a British breeding species.



EGGS OF THE KENTISH PLOVER. WHERE ARE THEY?

We walked about three miles over the roughest shingle, beneath a blazing hot sun, in order to try to find a Kentish Plover's nest. After a long search we saw two little birds running hither and thither at a distance of or about two hundred yards, but on examining them through our glasses they proved to be Ringed Plovers. These can

easily be distinguished at a distance by the broad collar of black round the bird's neck, while in the Kentish Plover this is narrower and is divided on the breast by white. The hens of both species are less brightly coloured, and more resemble the appearance of their stony home.

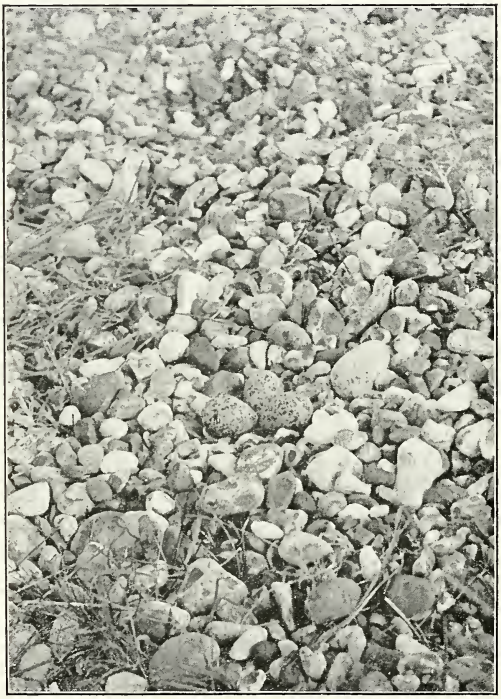
For another hour we lay upon the hot stones and searched all around with our binoculars, but failed to see any signs of the presence of Kentish Plovers. There was only one other place which they haunted, and that was four miles away. Hence there was nothing to be done but to continue our laborious tramp over the rough surface to that spot.

When one is hungry and thirsty a prospective walk of four miles seems a long distance, even on a good road; so that the reader can imagine what the journey appeared to wearied ornithologists who were shuffling along with back-stays for foot-gear, and had about sixty pounds of apparatus to carry. Luckily there was a modest refreshment house on the beach; but when we expectantly entered we were mortified to find that the host was 'out' of everything we so sorely needed. We were told that the baker was expected with a stock of provisions; and on looking back we could just discern a man in the far distance struggling over the shingle. At last the provision man arrived,

and we made one of the plainest and most enjoyable meals that such adventurers have ever partaken.

About a mile from this rightly-named Jolly Fisherman was the place where one or two Kentish Plovers have been known to breed. We naturally harboured grave doubts about finding a nest, as there was such a broad expanse of stones over which the search had to be made. At last, however, our highest hopes were raised ; for about two hundred yards off, our guide, who was gifted with remarkable eyesight, saw a bird dart away from its supposed nest, and run swiftly along the ground as if startled at our friendly approach. We all hastened in the direction indicated, each endeavouring to keep his eye on the spot from which the bird had started. On our arriving there we made diligent search, and were amply rewarded and delighted by seeing three yellowish eggs, with the unmistakable black scrawly markings, lying in a little depression in the stones. At the same time, so closely did these eggs correspond to the surrounding pebbles, that if we took our eyes off them it was no small difficulty to refind them. It is one of the wonders of instinct, that these feathered inhabitants of a little world of stones are not subject to any such risk or inconvenience. As soon as the camera was set up we found that other difficulties threatened to baffle us. Clouds obscured

the sun, while a wind blew from the sea with such force that we had almost as much difficulty in taking a photograph as we had in the case of the



EGGS OF KENTISH PLOVER.

Ringed Plover. Patience and perseverance, however, always bring success in this kind of enterprise, and after about an hour's waiting, we were successful

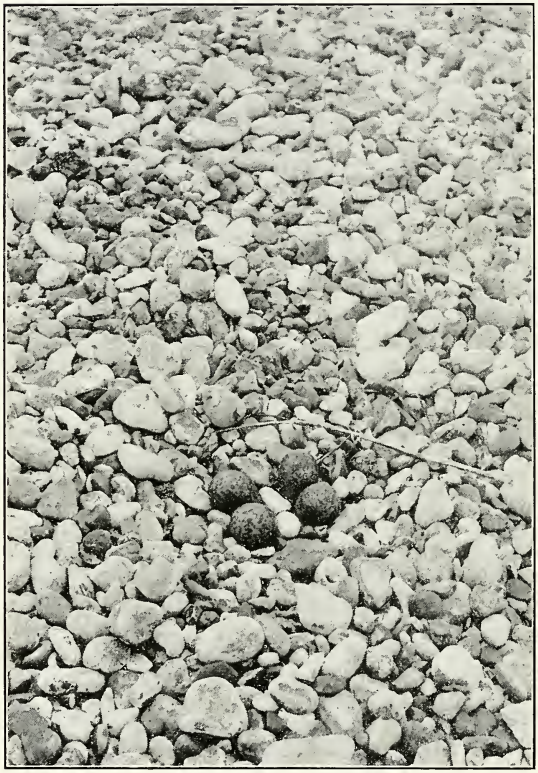
in obtaining some pictures which yielded us satisfaction as likely to prove of popular interest.

The eggs of the Kentish Plover cannot be confounded with those laid by any other British bird. The almost black zigzag markings on a clay-brown shell at once distinguish them. The birds run about the shingle with the utmost grace and agility, and it is an extremely fascinating bird-land sight to watch them with a field-glass, as they run about near their nest. The male bird was seen on the sand of the sea-shore, elegantly picking up food which was left by the receding waves. When enough had been gathered, he would swiftly fly to his sitting mate, to feed her with the dainty morsels.

My friend Mr. Dennis Godfray, who is well acquainted with the Kentish Plover in one of its British haunts, tells me that when the eggs are laid on fine shingle, the birds make a most elaborate collection of small fragments of shells, bleached crab-remains, etc., and place these round their eggs. It is only by the glitter of these shells that it is possible to find the eggs when they are on a fair way to incubation, for the sitting bird has a habit of burying its eggs in the sand until only the tops are visible. Two broods are reared each season on this sand-beach, the first eggs being laid about the first of June, the second at the beginning of August.

The Lapwing is another Plover which breeds on

the shingle. When the eggs of this species are laid on stones, no nest is made, but when a marshy



LAPWING'S NEST AND EGGS.

solitude is chosen, quite a substantial nest is built; and again, when in a dry field, the eggs are

simply laid in a slight hollow in the ground. The reader will see from my illustration, that the smaller ends all point inwards. If we alter their positions and put the large end inwards, the first thing which instinct teaches the Lapwing to do on her return will be to shift the eggs to their original position. A good-sized stone was among the eggs, as was the case with the Redshank's nest previously mentioned. One would have thought that such obstacles would have been of great discomfort to the sitting birds.

We are familiar with the fierce controversies which arose in Lilliput concerning the larger and the smaller ends of eggs. There seems to be something in it after all—at all events from the Lapwing's point of view.

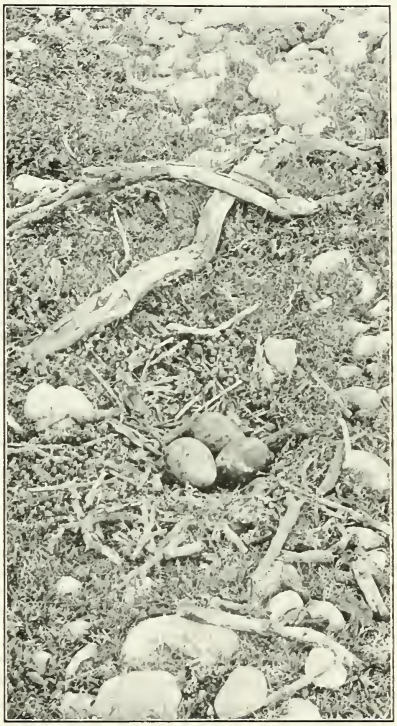
In parts of Scotland the Peewit has the reputation of being an unlucky bird. It is said that when the Covenanters were fleeing from their enemies, Lapwings were seen to be hovering over them, so that through these birds the pursuers of the Covenanters were able to discover their whereabouts. On another occasion, however, the Lapwing was the means of directing the followers of a certain chief to the place where he lay wounded. Certain young Green Plovers were probably in hiding somewhere near the fallen hero, and the parent birds would then fly round and about him, as they always will

if any one invades their nesting ground when the young are hatched.

To my mind, one of the prettiest sights to be met with in bird-land is the nesting site of a colony of Terns. On one part of the wide-stretching shingle beach there is a large family of Common Terns, and also a few of the Lesser Terns. The nests of the former species are placed close together, and are not nearly so difficult to find as those of the Little Tern. As soon as an intruder is seen among the nests all the birds rise, fly upward, and then perform the most graceful of aerial evolutions. The fishermen call these birds Sea-swallows, owing to their graceful and buoyant flight, and the name is eminently suitable.

While I was photographing a nest of the Common Tern, there suddenly occurred great commotion amongst the feathered colony overhead, and the cause very soon became apparent. It seems that Herring-Gulls are exceedingly fond of the Terns' eggs, and one of these large birds was actually seen to be making a raid on the colony. Uttering loud, harsh screams, *chee-u-i*, *chee-u-i*, some of the Terns formed up in a line on each side, while others got above and behind the robber bird. Those above swooped down upon the Gull, while those behind drove him forward; and under pressure from this formidable force the prisoner for the time being

was led, or rather driven, far out to sea. While we were lying up behind a ridge of shingle, endeavouring to find a Little Tern's nest by watching the birds with our field-glasses, this interesting performance was several times repeated.



NEST AND EGGS OF COMMON TERN.

We found and photographed many clutches of eggs of the Common Tern. In most instances a nest was formed, yet we also saw the eggs on the bare shingle. The three eggs vary a good deal; some are of a yellow ground-colour with brown markings, and others range to dark olive green.

We tried searching for the eggs of the Little

Tern, but to find them in this way was an almost impossible task, as they so marvellously resemble the stones lying around. By watching the actions of the birds, we were rewarded for our patience by discovering three nests; two of these only contained one egg, while the other had the full complement—three. Although these interesting birds have greatly diminished in numbers on this favourite breeding-ground when compared with the quantities that bred here twenty years ago, they are now gradually on the increase again. I sincerely hope collectors will not again attempt to thin their ranks, as they have done in the past. The small size of the eggs, and their distinct markings of two colours—vandyke brown and faint brown-grey—serve to distinguish them from all other eggs of the Tern family. Some eggs have all the marks pointing in one direction, the effect being as if the colours had been put on in a wet state, and had 'run'; the darker markings also blend in with the larger grey patches, and form another shade of brown.

The photograph of the Little Tern sitting on its eggs was obtained after some considerable difficulty and necessary patience. The camera itself was placed on the shingle, about two yards from the nest, and covered with a khaki-coloured cloth, this again being hidden, as much as possible, with stones. I then ventured to try the experiment of myself

hiding in the stones about one hundred and twenty feet from the camera, having a pneumatic tube connection to the instantaneous shutter. In this position I was unable to see the locality of the eggs, so that one of our party retired to about one hundred yards'

LITTLE TERN SITTING.

distance, meanwhile taking care that I could see him. By the aid of his field-glass he was able to see when the bird settled on her eggs. The Tern flew over the heap of stones under which the camera was hidden, as if undecided what to do, and then she disappeared from my view. Presently, however,

I saw my friend raise his hand, as a signal that the Tern was on her nest. One pressure of the ball was not sufficient to release the shutter, owing to the length of tubing; so I had to fill the tube with air, and then pinch it to prevent the air returning to the ball. This was unscrewed and allowed to fill, and then fixed on again, and by repeating this three times, enough air was in the tubing to set off the shutter. I was able, in this way, to get some pictures of this becoming and attractive bird. Two of the series are shown in this volume.

It will be seen from the photographs what a difficult thing it is to see eggs when laid on the pebbles of a wide-stretching shingle beach; but I can nevertheless assure the reader that they are very much more easily seen in the pictures than they were when lying among the stones. Only a few square inches surround the eggs in the finished prints; but let any interested person try to imagine what the difficulties are when there is a nest to be found surrounded by a square mile or more of shingle, and probably only a single nest at the best in this vast expanse of stones. The illustrations of nests, as given, are the result of three long days' work under such difficulties as have been described. Our chief hindrance was, undoubtedly, the wind, which is always more or less prevalent on such a great tract of flat country.

Some of the fishermen, who carry on their calling on the sea alongside this beach, are generally very familiar with the habits of these

EGGS OF LESSER TERN.

birds which make their homes among the stones. Many of their children are even adepts in their ability to discover the nests. Whenever any of

these youthful birdsnesters notice any intruder to be searching for eggs they will immediately make towards him and offer their own finds for sale.

As already hinted, it is a wonder to me how these birds manage so readily to find their nests again after having once left them. One of the more observant of the fishermen told me that sometimes the Little Tern will hover over the site of her nest for some time as if searching for the exact spot. Certainly one bird which we watched seemed to have some difficulty in finding her eggs again after we had roused her off them; for she flew backwards and forwards over the spot, or near to it, and when the eggs were at last seen she suddenly dropped to them. In the main, instinct may be a practically unerring guide; but in what degree at times it may possibly fail we know not. Indeed, we know no more about the mysteries of instinct than we do about those of gravitation.

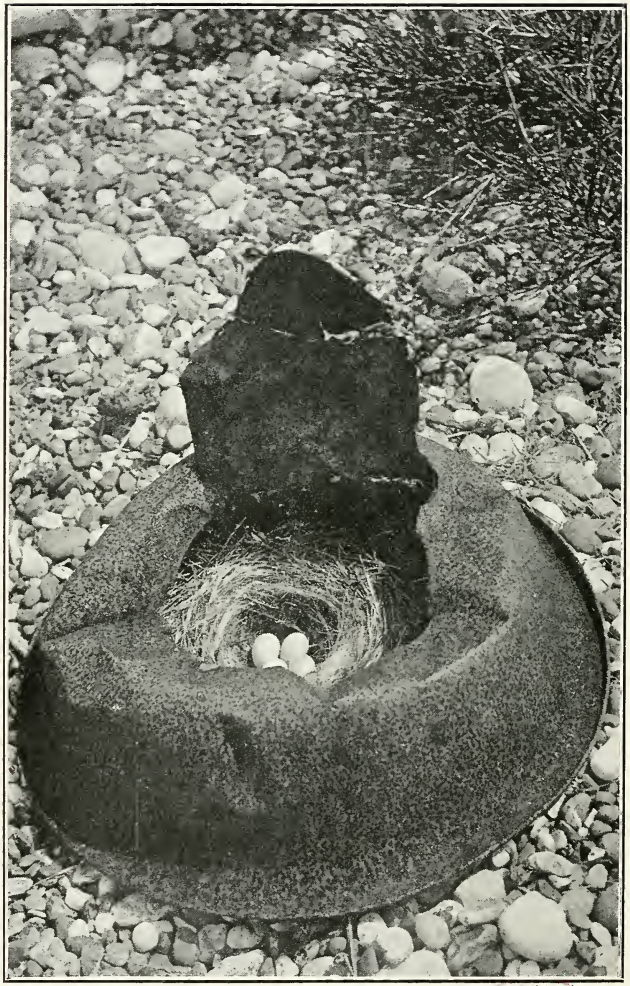
It was very noticeable that many of the eggs we found had a small twig or piece of wood near them. These were undoubtedly placed there by the birds, as landmarks. My friend Mr. Hanson, who visited this beach during the spring of 1899, also found this habit to be the general rule. When the eggs are near a bush or other prominent object no such landmarks are wanted.

On this stone beach are two large ponds. These

are surrounded by marshy ground, thick with reeds and sedge, while on the water are patches of aquatic plants forming small islands. A colony of Black-headed Gulls have bred in the pits for a great number of years, and when we visited them the birds were sitting on their eggs. It often happens

BLACK-HEADED GULL'S NEST.

that eggs are picked up on the shingle round the water, the birds being compelled to lay before the nests are ready. I was fortunate enough to find a very fine specimen, which I now have in my collection. The nests are exceedingly difficult to approach, owing to the marshy condition of the land nearest the water. One man who was a good



WHEATEAR'S NEST.

STON
PUBLIC
RARY

swimmer lost his life a few years ago in attempting to get to the eggs.

The brightest, but some of the smallest, birds which choose this shingle for their home are Wheatears. They breed in all sorts of queer places, the favourite being in the many rabbit burrows which are found in the few sandy portions of the beach. We heard of one being in a fish box, and could have photographed it if we had cared to walk another four miles over the shingle. The one pictured is in a characteristic place ; nearly all the old pans or tins lying on the land are taken possession of by these birds. The cock Wheatear is a handsome bird, and gives endless delight to an observer who cares to watch its engaging ways.

The acquaintance thus made with these birds which breed on stones was a new experience, which has left many pleasant memories. It seemed to be one of the less trodden byways of bird-land, which still served to widen one's views and appreciation of the wonders of nature as a whole.

III

The Passing of Winter

THE presence of the Redwing in the meadow tells us as plainly as falling leaves and changing tints can do, that summer is dead. Hedge-rows which a few days before were tinted with crimson and gold, are now naked and black, only relieved by bunches of red berries by way of autumn's cheer. Instead of now eating the fruit, the birds let it hang until frost and snow clear the country of other supplies. The birds are as yet wild and difficult to approach; for food is plentiful, and all birds are wild under such circumstances.

Other signs that the year is dying are seen on every hand. Here and there stand once gay flower-stalks, now drooping and bare, reminding us of the brighter days not long passed. When Swallows left for the sunshine of the South, the trees were shedding their leaves, and now only the oaks and young beeches have their foliage—and

this is shrivelled and brown. Fieldfares haunt the margins of woods, and are seen singly; they do not flock together until colder weather comes. From amongst the decaying leaves which accumulate where wood and field meet, a Woodcock is occasionally seen; I indeed almost tread upon one before it rises, and flies away with its curious zigzag flight, to be out of view in a moment or so.

In marshy, low-lying meadows Snipe are sometimes flushed; it is impossible to see them as they 'squat' on the mud. I once stood within a few yards of where I had watched some Snipe down. The ground had been freshly turned, and vegetation was almost absent,—just here and there a tuft of grass showing itself, but not enough to conceal a bird. I knew within a few inches where the Snipe were, and looked carefully, but not a bird could be seen. Approaching, I looked again, but still none were visible; then, when almost on the spot, several rose from a space of four feet square, the very part which had been looked over. I just mention this incident to show how the Snipe can effectively hide on bare ground by simply 'squatting' and relying on the colour of its feathers, which harmonise so wonderfully with the bare earth.

The music which made valley and hill alike so joyful in spring is almost absent. Robins still sing,

however, and Hedge Sparrows do so at intervals. Young Carrion-Crows still follow their parents, and when their loud, harsh cry sounds through the woods, many of the smaller birds fly from their path to seek shelter in the thicker bushes.

As the days pass, so the procession of winter goes forward. Each rising and setting of the sun brings a still more wintry aspect. The first frosts make most birds tame. Finches sit in rows on slender twigs, with feathers ruffled and heads drawn in. Thrushes and Blackbirds invade gardens and search diligently for hidden snails; when one is found they come into the open and violently dash the shell on to a stone until it breaks.

The stream is still made fascinating by the presence of the Kingfisher. As he flies past, or stops to hover for a moment over the water, his colours seem more brilliant even than in summer days; and this is owing to the banks of the stream being bare of coloured flowers. The water also is less clear; for ditches and miniature watercourses, which drain into the brook, bring sand as they flow alongside the wood or trickle down the pathway from the hill, and in consequence, the stream in winter is not so pure as when the butterflies flitted along its banks. But although other charms of summer have passed away, the Kingfisher still remains; and the little bird of azure blue, as it

darts past, seems for the moment to bring back the light of summer.

With the first fall of snow we are able to get quite close to the wildest birds. Redwings and Fieldfares do not fly from our path, as they were wont to do; they stay in the trees and watch while we pass, although the latter sometimes rise and settle again a little farther on, their loud call, *chuff-chuff-chuff*, relieving the wintry quietness. A Kestrel sits on a prominent oak branch to survey the white country for half an hour at a time; then he will buoyantly sally forth and hover over the banks of the stream and other spots where the snow is thinner, or where grass blades show through the whiteness.

With hoar frost on their lesser branches, and snow on the thicker boughs, the trees make up as it were a wintry battalion, subdued and patient, waiting for the return of spring. The woods are thus still most beautiful. Standing underneath large trees and gazing upward, the scene is as if one were in a great forest of white coral. Wonderful groves, one beyond and above another, of glistening frost-crystal-covered branches stretch before one, seeming fit homes for fairies; while on each side smaller bushes fill up the alcoves, and seem as though they might be their bowers.

Here and there rises a giant tree amongst smaller

companions, standing out with whitened branches, silent and motionless, like a sentinel of winter and of the wood. Blue Tits, always busy birds, search underneath the larger boughs where the snow has not reached; Robins hunt under bramble bushes for food, and if one enters another's domain a fight ensues. On the western side of the trees, where snow has not found a resting-place, silver-breasted Tree-Creepers ascend. Sometimes a large tree is chosen, at other times a thin trunk is well searched; the firs, however, seem their favourite haunts, through being more sheltered. Goldcrests and Long-tailed Tits in company pass from tree to tree, and knock down little showers of snow crystals as they hang in curious positions on the branches. Their faint call-notes, *zee-zee-zee*, are as music in the woods when most birds are silent; Blue Tits make the woods the merriest, with their musical *chi-chi*, *ching-ching*, uttered incessantly throughout the morning, and the Great Tits respond with their louder cry.

If it were not for the presence of birds in the fields and woods in winter, Nature would seem to be really dead. The interesting little workers give life to the seemingly dormant surroundings; and without their enlivening notes and engaging actions the country would be sombre indeed. But where birds are there are also life and happiness.

There is one thing which relieves the monotony of the life of the City of London, preventing its becoming to a naturalist, in a sense, the dullest place on earth, and that is the presence of Sparrows and Pigeons. The Sparrows especially seem to give to the unpicturesque squares and still less interesting streets, a little taste of the country; and even their noisy quarrels and merry chirpings are a source of interest to some at least in the crowds who pass them by.

The first snow does not last long; the fields look green once more, again the birds are singing. Sky-Larks are soaring and attempting to utter their notes, but not succeeding soon descend, for the winter, though yielding a little to spring's advance, has not yet left us. After a few days of clearer sunshine we begin to hope that spring is really with us, but suddenly the cold pall of winter again overshadows the land. So sudden is this after the warm days, that certain birds are starved, especially Starlings. Rooks stand in the snow-covered meadows, and fly to anything which shows black above the whiteness, a dismal *caw* being given when this is seen not to be food. Others keep under oaks and scratch the snow away, turning up a quantity of dead leaves in their efforts to find acorns.

Finches call from the railway embankment; there are many kinds there, for numbers of dead plants stand where the snow is thinnest, and on these,

eating the seeds, are Linnets and others. Pert little Redpolls are the most interesting: they perch on the stalks, which bend with their weight, break open the pods and allow the seeds to fall on the snow, then descend and feast on the supply thus ingeniously collected. If a companion or one of the Linnets approach, an angry whistle, *pe-u-e*, is uttered, and their red crests are raised. The plump, well-built, busy little birds look by their pretty habits as if no weather would upset their equanimity. Though Linnets are quieter they are quite as busy, but not so easy to approach. The confiding Redpolls seem perfectly unconscious of our presence, and swing to and fro on stems while we stand quite near to them. Cock Chaffinches are also here, dressed in their handsome winter plumage; they walk gracefully about on the crisp white surface, as well becomes a bird in such royal colours. Every now and then many of the birds rise and fly to other parts, but it is noticed that Redpolls remain and diligently 'work' the seed-pods.

Large flocks of Larks fly southward in hope of finding food, so also do Redwings. Fieldfares remain and flock together; and it is a problem what they feed on, for all the hips and haws were cleared from the hedges during the first fall of snow.

Underneath a hedgerow something white attracts notice; it is of a different tint to the snow, and

stooping to see what it may be, I am surprised to find a flower of the white dead nettle. Just this one little cluster of velvety white flowers standing alone in acres of snow-covered ground seems strangely out of place. Is it a sign that winter has not long to stay?

Days pass, however, and snow still lies on the trees and ground, but the pure whiteness gives place to darker shades, the reason being that winds have caused tiny furrows to form on the surface, and these throw shadows which cause the apparent darker shade to appear.

How effectively does snow bring out the shapes of trees! The graceful curve of the ash can be recognised from a great distance; so also can the oaks, while the elm has its own peculiar form. Nearly all the trees can be distinguished as well as they could in summer. Although the leaves add a great charm, even bare trees are still attractive; we see what did not so much strike us before; they have a beauty in their time of winter rest.

One evening, as the Starlings are going to their roosting-place in the ivy-covered house, one is seen to fall from the flock. It sustains a broken leg in falling; the frozen snow does not yield as it would if freshly drifted. The poor bird just had strength to reach its nightly home, and then gave in exhausted. It died soon after, and on examination

it is seen that skin, bones, and feathers are practically all that is left of this once noisy and active little creature. Starvation had done its work; and hundreds of others suffered a similar fate. Dead birds are seldom seen in the open fields. A characteristic habit of birds and other animals is to hide in some out-of-the-way nook when death is drawing near.

At length the snow shows signs of melting and giving way before the increasing strength of the sun; but at night it freezes again and so counterbalances the action of the heat. The wind, however, one evening goes round to the south-west, and the effect is remarkable. In about twelve hours there is not a trace of snow to be seen, and the low-lying meadows, which a few hours ago were clothed in white, are now several feet deep in water. The cart-ruts down the hillsides are miniature rivers, and make the water below rise still more rapidly.

On the margins of the newly formed lakes many species of birds are feeding. Fieldfares and Redwings are there, Pied Wagtails, a Carrion-Crow, Meadow-Pipits—the latter continually 'sparring' at each other and calling *weet-weet*; many kinds of Finches also are seen. On the water itself eight Moor-hens are contentedly swimming gracefully about, and looking as if the flooded field had been their home for long instead of only for a few hours. Missel Thrushes, Blackbirds, large parties of Starlings,

Sparrows, and a host of other birds add to the mixed crowd, and they are all surprisingly tame, with the exception of the Crow; and all were intent on one object—to obtain a good meal, and it was easy to see that their appetites were being satisfied.

The next day broke fresh and cloudless, and the weather continued so for awhile. Spring seemed to be coming on apace. On a piece of waste ground are hundreds of tiny white flowers nestling among leaves of emerald green. Chickweed thus loses no time in taking advantage of the life-giving sunshine. The banks by the hedgeside are becoming daily more green, the umbelliferous plants are growing rapidly and hiding others of slower growth.

Birds everywhere are singing and rejoicing in the approach of spring. Cock Sparrows are daily carrying on furious battles, cheered on, as it were, by the chattering hens. The Rooks hold their 'parliaments' more frequently, and some fly to the rookeries and have loud and long consultations on the dilapidated condition of the nests. Some of the older and more astute members of the colony take possession of the best nests, and forthwith commence repairing them. In the wood Ring-Doves are cooing sweetly to each other, and are already thinking of nesting, while Crows are searching for eligible sites for building.

Sheltered ground beneath the woodland trees is

white with drooping snowdrops; and while taking notice of these a Sky-Lark, just over the hedge in a meadow, rises and soars upwards with a full burst of glorious song. The familiar notes, which I had not heard during many months, held me enraptured. Higher and higher he rises, his notes sounding weaker as he nears the white fleecy clouds. At last the singer reaches his limits, flutters and struggles to get higher, but strength fails, although he still sings, resting on outspread wings, and then he descends.

The pure notes go straight to my heart and fill me with joy. Down, down he comes—still slowly—and singing as if his little body could not contain the joy and thanksgiving he is pouring out so passionately and fully. Half way down he stops, flutters and tries to soar again, but he cannot; again his wings are spread and he comes downwards. What memories the notes awaken; what thoughts of past springtimes and brighter summers! The very notes, though simple, speak of joy, and seem to be connected with sunshine and flowers. A spell holds me as this little harbinger of spring heralds coming brighter days, and I cannot leave the spot while he continues to sing. But at length he is almost down; his wings are closed; he drops to the earth; the music ends, and the meadows seem by way of contrast to be wrapt in silence.

THE WINTER HAS PASSED.

IV

Early Spring in a Middlesex Wood

ALTHOUGH the first week in April has nearly passed, no feathered migrants have yet arrived. Still, there is no lack of song to welcome on-coming Spring. A Blackbird gives forth his wild notes from a tree on the one hand, and seems to encourage others; on the other side is a Coal Tit, busy in working round the leaves of a holly bush; and every now and then he knocks one off while capturing insects. In the interior of the wood some Jays are screaming, and Jackdaws join in with their cry of *jaack*.

The wood itself is not so green as is usual at this time of the year. Everything in the way of natural growths is backward. Round about the base of bushes and trees decaying leaves have collected in small heaps; and these give rise to a continual rustling when disturbed by the wind. Some dead bracken still stands, but the main part is broken down. The prevailing tint is brown;

for, in addition to fallen leaves and bracken, a number of young trees still retain their shrivelled foliage. Holly bushes, however, show a dark green tint here and there, and so relieve the prevailing colour.

Between the bushes and heaps of drifted leaves there is a green carpet of moss. We can walk on this silently, and approach both birds and animals without their quick ears giving them warning. I am able to stalk a Thrush and get within touching distance, and then retire without the bird knowing of my presence. A rabbit emerges from a little canopy of bracken and unconcernedly feeds near where I stand; and then other companions come on the scene, and all skip about, jumping over each other, and running round, throwing up their hind legs as if kicking at some imaginary object. A Ring-Dove flies across the wood, and with much noise settles on a holly bush. *Coo-coo-coo* is now heard; and from a tree farther in the wood an answer at once comes—a call for the first bird to fly away to join its mate.

But hark! what is that commotion on the ground? The cause soon becomes apparent: a rabbit, panting with fright and exertion, dashes past, just stopping to stand up on his haunches and to prick up ears before darting on again at

BLACKBIRD'S NEST.

full speed. Other rabbits which have been feeding near hasten to their holes to lie concealed in safety. It is easy to guess what has occasioned all this excitement: a weasel is on the track in search of prey, and in a few minutes the determined little animal appears, following in the rabbit's footsteps as perseveringly as any beast of prey might do. He looks a comical, diminutive fellow, as he runs along with an odd kind of hopping movement, and arched back. Sniffing to the right and then to the left, he moves slower than the rabbit, but we may rest assured that the weasel will win in this race.

So persistent are these small depredators that they will follow a trail for a mile or more, and in the end they nearly always secure their prey. Many rabbits are passed by in the seemingly slow hunt; and while these are left untouched, undivided attention is given to the animal which is being tracked. The doomed rabbit halts to rest many times, crouching in the grass, but only again to hear the same plodding and approach of its enemy. Rushing forward, more scared at every stage, the timid bunny is at last exhausted, or thoroughly worn out by fright, and it will either hide in a burrow, or bury its head in thick-growing grass. The rabbit is now doomed; for the weasel follows, and is soon partaking of a hard-earned meal. At

night weasels will noiselessly climb hedges to capture roosting birds. While on nocturnal rambles in bird-land, the last cry of a captured bird, or the squeal of a dying rabbit is often heard. Weasels as interesting little creatures are becoming scarcer each year, owing to the havoc they cause among game birds. They have a habit of prying into nearly every hole they see; and knowing this, the trapper places a box in the corner of a field with a small hole in the side; the trap is put just inside the hole, and the weasel, innocently entering, is caught. My friend Mr. Hanson once saw a weasel being chased down a well-frequented road at Tottenham by a number of angry, chattering sparrows. The weasel had evidently been trespassing near their nests, and the clamouring birds—about thirty in all—gave chase and scared the dangerous little intruder away.

THE SCARED RABBIT.

Blackbirds are perhaps the most persistent singers at this time of the year. They are on all sides

around, and when one finishes his song and pauses others fill up the interval, so that the music shall still go on. One has just settled on the summit of a young beech, under which rabbits are again playing. His sable form is outlined against the blue sky; both loud and sweet is his short whistling song; and then he passes on, presently to be heard in another part of the wood. The Blackbird is restless: he does not sing from one perch, like the Thrush; he moves about, so as to give to each part of the wood the benefit of his notes.

ROBIN'S NEST.

Carrion-Crows are building not far away; the pair are constantly calling. Moor-hens, too, are

continually crying *karra*; the lake in the wood being an attraction to various water-fowl. Two Robins have been watching me for some time; they are building near, for one has a dead leaf in its beak; but no amount of waiting seems likely to discover the site of their nest. I searched carefully where I thought it might be found, but no trace could be seen. Robins will never allow the whereabouts of their nest to be discovered while building; if watched, they will keep away from their half-finished home for hours. Such is the intelligence of instinct.

At the extreme end of the wood is a grass bank under the hedge, and while passing alongside of this I saw a Robin's nest already containing eggs. The sitting bird betrayed the site by flying out; if she had remained still her nest would not have been pictured here. In the hedge a Blackbird's nest is found with two eggs—not even a branch hides it from a passer-by. The few Blackbirds and Thrushes which build before the leaves appear never seem to build their nests in sheltered places. I think these must belong to young birds, which have not had the experience of some of their older companions; the latter always build in 'tight' places from the photographer's point of view.

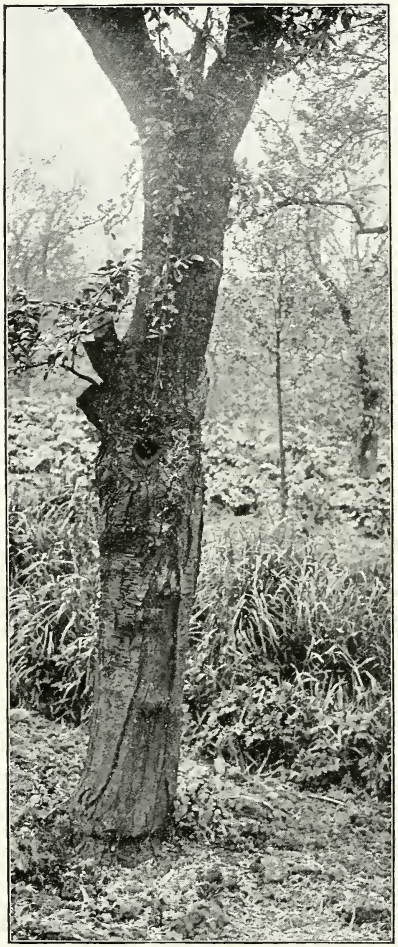
A strange Robin from another quarter of the wood perches on a stump and commences to sing;

but before the song is over one of the Robins which are building near fiercely charges the intruder and drives him away. Woodpeckers are busy at their nesting-holes; and the rattling noise they make while boring is very deceiving. I have often tried to stalk them; but when I reached the place whence the noise at first seemed to come, the skilful operators seemed to be as far away as ever, and eventually the nest has been discovered nearly half a mile distant, although the noise at first sounded only one hundred yards off. It is the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, the smallest of the species, which makes the most noise; the Greater Spotted Woodpecker also can be heard at a great distance when at work. When the Green Woodpecker bores a nesting-hole, it works in quieter style. There are several pairs in the wood, and they are constantly calling, but it is difficult to get near them. I have seen them busy near an ant-hill; and a charming sight it is when this bird, clothed in his spring plumage, runs here and there, darting out his long tongue to pick up ants.

The Woodpecker's tongue is covered with a glutinous substance, and insects have no chance of escape if they are once touched. In addition to this, the tip of the horny tongue is also provided with a number of delicate bristles, slanting in a backward direction. These are also very useful

in extracting insects from deep crevices in decayed trees, or from holes in the ground. When the winter months are exceptionally warm, Woodpeckers will commence their nesting-holes in the opening weeks of the year. The same tree is often chosen year after year. I knew of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker's hole which a pair of Marsh-Tits were wanting to appropriate. When the Woodpecker returned and found them in possession it began another hole a little farther down the tree. A Greater Spotted Woodpecker has made its nesting-hole near where I sit; it is immediately over a pathway along which hundreds of people pass weekly, and chips of wood from the hole are strewn on the gravel. As I write, the bird returns and runs up the trunk in a series of short jerks. Now he descends, not like a Nuthatch would do, by turning round and going down head foremost; he walks, or rather jerks himself down, tail first. I am then suddenly seen, and with a short cry the bird hurriedly flies away.

The Blackbird, which has been going the round of the wood, has just returned to sing his wild notes once again from the same tree-top; but he is still in a hurried mood, and flies across the pathway to the bushes. At the end of the wood is an open space, where are some sallow bushes, about which many insects are flying. A humble-



SITE OF GREATER SPOTTED WOODPECKER'S NEST.

bee—the first seen of the season—buzzes past; but, attracted by the yellow, sweet-smelling catkins, he turns in his path and settles on a flower.

Over the wood-side hedge is a long, hilly, winding road. I seldom can quite reach the end of this interesting lane when exploring it, for there is always so much to see and admire at all seasons of the year. In spring-time many kinds of birds are always there, busy attending to their nests; bright flowers and gay butterflies adorn the roadside

in summer. When autumn brings her golden tints to the oaks, squirrels play about the branches; and in winter, hundreds of small birds can always be seen searching for food in the hedges, which are tall enough to make the seclusion more complete. There is always something to attract attention, and to learn in this lane. Nature always teaches some new lesson if we wait with patience while making our observations. The secret of seeing to advantage wild Nature and her many species of birds and animals is to remain perfectly still, and wait for the birds and animals to come to us.

Beside ancient rugged trees, in which Jackdaws are now building, there is here and there a picturesque cottage—a charming old place externally, which harmonises well with the green surroundings. Such homesteads are not like commonplace modern villas, but look as though, like the trees, they had been placed there by Nature. These old homesteads have stood for scores of years, and will remain long after many modern ill-built houses have fallen to ruin. Whatever may have been the faults of our forefathers, they knew how to build houses that would last. Whatever they did in this department they did well, and their hearts were in their work. In our day the countryside is so often marred by builders whose learning is confined to the catechism of money-making by jerry-building.

V

Round and about a Suburban Orchard
Part I. Spring

THE soft air is filled with the perfume of fruit blossoms. Row after row of plum trees stand robed in clusters of white flowers, that are as dazzling to the eyes as snow when we look upon them. A few days ago these branches were bleak and bare, but the mysterious power of the sun has in so short a time opened the buds, which now diffuse their scent in all the beauty and promise of young spring life. Now and again a white petal floats down upon the still air, to find a resting-place on my note-book. Sometimes a bird knocks off a blossom, at other times a bee will cause one to fall. The humble-bee seems always to be in a hurry; for it dashes along, and, when settled on a flower, does not stay, but hurries onward to another, while others, quite as industrious, take its place. There are hundreds of such passing to and fro among the lovely and inviting blossoms. Butterflies also, now

awakened from their winter sleep, are attracted by

GARDEN-WARBLER'S NEST.

the sweet-smelling flowers, and flit merrily about the green avenues of trees. Although it was a very

cold winter, many of these have survived to see this great resurrection. A Peacock butterfly settles on the greensward by the pathway; its wings are ragged and torn, but the warmth and sunny cheerfulness of this spring day has brought it from a protected place of hiding. So also is it with the Common Blue butterfly, that little jewel of Nature which we associate with the hot days of July and August. One dances along as it were, and joins in the procession of spring, now returning to claim its own.

Garden-Warblers have just arrived, but are not yet in full song. They are in many a tree, and they can be seen to be picking insects out from the blossoms. How delicately they take their food! Very quietly they creep about the branches, and gracefully eat the insects, seeming as if they were almost afraid of damaging the petals. What a contrast is such carefulness to the destructiveness of the Bullfinch! I love the Garden-Warblers above all woodland birds; they have always been favourites of mine, on account of their winning habits. The Blackcap is nobler, both in song and plumage, but still the Garden-Warbler is my chief woodland friend. Blackcaps came back to their old haunts a week ago, and are now filling the alcoves of the blossom-mantled trees with their own sweet wild music. When they first arrived

their song lacked the fulness and perfection that now gives it perfect charm.

I love to think that it must be the beauty of the spring which makes the birds sing so perfectly at such a time. To live among all this loveliness seems as though it must have an inspiring effect even on them. Just think of the freshness of the newly-clad world that is their native domain. In the springtime they live in luxury beyond description; we cannot look in any direction without seeing flowers, and insects and other food are here in greatest profusion. No wonder that the air is filled with avian music—an expression of their joy and satisfaction.

One of the most charming attributes of Nature is the luxuriance of her gifts. There is not only no stint, the provision is profuse; each tree has thousands of leaves, yet not one too many. If we were to take a thousand leaves from a large tree it would still present an unaltered appearance. The fields also abound with flowers, and grass blades are there without number, yet each has its place. Pluck a flower here, or break a branch from the hedgerow there, and Nature soon fills up the gap.

Another attraction of Nature is her perfect symmetry without uniformity. Nature does not work like a machine, but gives proof of an Infinite Intelligence in her designs. Every tree differs from its neighbour, and no two leaves are alike in form. Note the

blossom on the trees; the branches are hidden by bunches of flowers, each having its own tint.

A stream divides the orchard from a wood adjoining, and a waggon-track along the bank overshaded on one side by woodland trees, and on the other by a variety of fruit blossoms, makes an extended bower of rare attraction—a paradise of promise for harvest time. A continuous stream of life passes along underneath this sylvan canopy. Butterflies, one following another, fly by, and Warblers sing in the bushes. A few Orange-tip butterflies, some of the most beautiful objects of returning spring, have here and there emerged from the chrysalis, and have entered upon their life in a perfect state, to make the brilliantly clad fields still more fascinating. As the Garden-Warbler is my best-liked bird, so is the Orange-tip my favourite butterfly, being always associated in my mind with one of the most delightful pictures of Nature which I ever looked upon. I had suffered from a long illness; but on the first day I was able to go abroad I wandered alongside this same orchard from which I now write. It was winter when I took to my bed; and I was almost cut off from Nature except what I was able to observe from my chamber window. The scene which I looked upon when I walked along this pathway will always remain a lasting picture in my mind. I

remember my emotions of delight when I once more looked upon Nature clothed in her spring garb. It was as if I had suddenly entered a paradise of beauty—a remnant of Eden. The trees were a blaze of colour, as they are now, while birds

ORANGE-TIP BUTTERFLY.

aloft and on every side seemed to be singing more sweetly than they ever sang before. I remember more particularly a Blackcap perched on a hawthorn branch, whose song rings in my ears still. But what chiefly attracted my attention was the Orange-tip butterflies, which were fluttering hither and

thither over the flowers. One settled on me, and bathed its delicate wings in the sunshine. It was the first time I had seen this species in this orchard, so that their very presence seemed to inspire new love for Nature. Ever since, when I see one of these butterflies, I think of that scene in Nature's great gallery that is so vividly photographed on my mind.

Willow-Wrens seem to be the commonest birds in the orchard; as soon as one finishes his song another takes up the chiming notes, and the merry undulating whistle can be heard from more than a few trees in the great orchard. The males at this season will fight desperately for the hens: one pair of veterans have just had a 'set to' in a plum tree, and the victor is now singing proudly, even defiantly, from a top branch. No doubt his partner, whom he has so gallantly won, is near at hand to encourage his chivalrous sentiments. I like to watch these pert little Warblers making their nest. The hen does most of the building; but her mate

GREEN-VEINED WHITE BUTTERFLY ASLEEP ON GRASS STEM.

brings the grasses, as a labourer might to a skilled artificer, and after he has given his burden to the builder he mounts to the tree above and sings, evidently for joy. When the nest is completed he has to sing the livelong day for very satisfaction.

Two Woodpeckers are at work in the wood beyond

GARDEN-WARBLER SITTING.

the stream; the loud resonant noise they make while boring holes can be heard for nearly a mile. A miniature waterfall adds diversity to the brook, and where the water gently trickles down, a little basin of crystal water has been formed. Here numbers of song-birds come to drink and bathe. A few minutes ago Greenfinches were splashing about, and

settled on the branches above to flutter and shake themselves while drying their feathers. Now a Thrush is drinking and more Greenfinches come and await their turn; there is a *piping* from a hawthorn bush, and a Bullfinch hops down and drinks from the little pool. All the birds know of this bath of clear trickling water, and during the whole morning the twittering Finches and Linnets come and go. A few stay to sing, and then, seemingly attracted by the lovely orchard, fly thither and are lost sight of among the blossoms.

Flowers are beginning to cover the banks of the stream with their seasonable hues. White and red dead nettles are the most abundant, but here and there a primrose—the flower of spring—shines from amongst a wreath of green. Violets are nearly over; just one here and another there are all that are left of the numbers that covered the banks a few days ago.

As the thick nettles grow up, so the grass and other plants try to reach above them in the struggle for existence. The great struggle for life which is always taking place in tropical forests is a sight such as very few have an opportunity of seeing. The same kind of thing on a smaller scale, however, goes on along an English stream-bank, or hedgerow during spring. When the winter frosts have gone and the warmer days arrive, the grass commences to grow rapidly in ever-increasing quantities; but

in places the sunlight penetrates through the thickly matted blades. Hundreds of seeds which have lain dormant commence to germinate, and all of these push upwards to reach the light. Those that the sun's rays can reach quickly gain strength; and the battle is then between the seedlings themselves and the grass. The stronger win, and thousands of seedlings die because no light reaches them. If we part the thickest grass clumps and allow the light to enter below, we shall see in a very short time dozens of seedlings shoot up and commence a struggle amongst themselves which otherwise would not have taken place.

Some of the weaker plants would have no chance if they had to rely on themselves to reach the light. Take the convolvulus, for instance. The tiny seedling will push towards one of its stronger neighbours and commence to wind around it for support. When it reaches the sunlight it immediately becomes strengthened, and envelopes, and sometimes kills the plant which at first was so much stronger than itself, and even saved its life. I have seen its white flowers at the top of a tall, thick hawthorn bush; below, the bindweed was thin and the leaves were small, but look at the top, where it receives the stimulus of life-giving sun! A mass of white flowers is there, and the leaves are large and healthy.

The umbelliferous plants are some of the strongest,

and in the struggle generally win. When once they have outstripped the grass and have secured more light and room they very quickly grow, and will even top the tall nettles; they resemble miniature trees, while Whitethroats delight to build in their shelter, although for some reason the nests are never placed actually in these large plants, but in the lower herbage. Here, at all events, these plants are in the greatest evidence, and the stream bank is a mass of white from their umbel-like flower heads. Every now and then one will shake, and a bird will dart out and flutter above the miniature forest—as it must seem to them—just stay to catch a fly, and then dart back again.

If we move some of these plants aside and examine the ground, we see many small tracks or tunnels through the dwarf jungle. Most of these are formed by mice; and if we exercise a little patience, one of these quiet brown animals will be seen to run along its own made pathway. It may even be our good fortune, while lying hidden amongst this thick cover, to see these engaging little rodents at play; or, what is still prettier, climb about plant stems like tiny monkeys, whose antics in some measure they seem to imitate. When wandering about country lanes, one often hears the mice and shrews squeaking, but how few people ever take the trouble to find out whence the curious noises come! By carefully

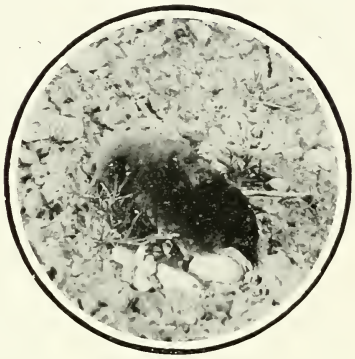
WHITETHROAT'S NEST.

parting the grass and then waiting, one is amply rewarded for any trouble or patience; for sooner or later these interesting animals will appear. The Kestrel knows all about them; for when once this bird of prey has seen a mouse emerge from cover, and does not catch it at the first attempt, it is surprising how long the bird will hover over that spot. Sometimes instead of hovering he will settle on the ground near the 'run,' and wait until the mouse shows itself.

Across the stream in the shady depths of the wood, and sheltered by a green canopy of young leaves, there are a host of daffodils, which, however, are now fading. Bluebells—a flower all children love—help to tint the many-coloured woodland carpet. In one corner of the orchard the ground is overspread with yellow, dandelions being the chief covering, but the lesser celandine, too, is there. When we come farther into this golden corner a blue tint is seen to mingle with the yellow. Between the dandelions are patches of veronica, whose small flowers of brilliant blue look as though they might be jewels fallen from some fairy eastern sky, so chastely brilliant are their petals. The germander speedwell is one of the most beautiful of our wild flowers.

In the corner beyond the flowers are many small hills; and late in the afternoon the moles, which

made them, will often come above ground. I once caught one and placed it on fairly hard ground, to see whether it could burrow into it. Several attempts were made, and at last the persevering little creature had to give up the attempt. When placed on softer ground it buried itself out of sight in less than a minute; and I obtained a photograph of the operation just as it was disappearing. The mole will sometimes squeak loudly if disturbed or alarmed. A few years ago I came across a large specimen in this orchard; and when I touched it with a stick, it squealed after the manner of a pig, but of course in a minor key. Then to me it has been really surprising to note how rapidly a worm can move when a mole is in pursuit. One



MOLE.

MOLE BURROWING.

day I saw several worms rushing out of the ground at an incredible speed for them, and presently a mole also came to the surface, showing the cause of their alarm. I was quite unaware that worms could move so quickly until I witnessed this demonstration of the fact.

In this corner of the orchard the birds are singing as if each were trying to surpass all the others; and one is struck with the beauty and purity of their voices. No one song can really be heard separately or distinctly, but there is a harmonious chorus of Blackbirds, Blackcaps, Whitethroats, Willow-Wrens, and Thrushes. The tiny brown Wren, too, joins in this full concert; he also must take his part. He sits on a dead stump in the hedge; and his song, given with quivering wings and tail bobbing up and down, can be heard above all of his bigger comrades. Twice he sings, and then dives into the thick hedge; for he has a nest there made of dead leaves—this being known only to myself and the occupiers. Another pair of Wrens have their nest in a gravel pit beyond the orchard boundary; it is built into the earth, and much resembles its surroundings. Near it are two empty nests built into the earth in the same way. These extra nests, which Wrens always build, have long been a mystery as to the purpose they served. My opinion is, that they are used by the young to roost in, after the manner

of young Moor-hens, which always have sleeping nests provided for them by their parents. Wrens as a rule, lay eight eggs, and it would be an impossibility for eight young to roost in one nest when nearly full grown. A great many young birds return at night to their nests to sleep, long after they are able to provide for themselves.

Swallows sweetly twitter overhead, and skim above and round about the orchard trees, sometimes resting on the branches. This umbrageous and fruitful orchard forms the charming world of hundreds of Warblers, and of other migratory birds, during their stay in this country. When the blossom fades, Garden-Warblers will begin to build in the gooseberry bushes below the larger trees. Blackcaps build in the bushes bordering the stream; Whitethroats make their home along the hedgeside, hidden by hedge-parsley. Missel-Thrushes already have their nests in the trees, and a pair of Hawfinches have just commenced building in a tree near where I stand. Blackbirds and Thrushes breed in large numbers, principally on the ground, some of their nests being concealed among grass and nettles alongside the orchard pathway. The majority are to be found in clumps of rhubarb, however, and this seems to be a curious place for a nest, but there have they built and reared broods year after year. A Greenfinch flies past, with some difficulty carrying a large

piece of tangled grass ; and I know of a Chaffinch's nest in yonder hedge, so that the finches are now all very busy. Then Moor-hens on the stream are already collecting food for their young, or showing them where to find it for themselves. Just now I saw three little black balls—the young Moor-hens—standing on the edge of their nest ; they were evidently just hatched, for they had yet to learn to hide themselves as soon as an intruder appeared. The mother bird flies away in great alarm and calls to them, but they—innocent little strangers—look at me and prefer

THRUSH'S NEST IN RHUBARB CLUMP.

to squeak at each other contentedly and unalarmed.

What a world of interest there is to see in an orchard like this in the days of spring! Wheresoever one wanders, or looks, we cannot but be struck with the exceeding beauty and varied wonders of Nature. Here and now we see her at her fairest, clothed in freshest garb, and made charming and melodious by the love-talk or song of countless birds. We cannot appreciate all this as we ought, or as we would; the mind cannot grasp all the meaning of such marvels. I never yet could write what I felt when gazing on the first primrose of spring, or listening to the first call of the Chiff-chaff. Look upon this glorious patch of veronica: one flower, one petal even, is a wonder of beauty in itself; yet here are myriads. Amidst all this profusion we cannot concentrate our thoughts upon one single plant, insect, or bird; there are such numbers, and each and all are so wonderful. Every leaf, or even each blade of grass that we so carelessly trample upon, is 'a thing of beauty'; and we look around until the mind seems to become bewildered by the lavishness of Nature's gifts—the handiwork of an Infinite Creator.

While the pageant of spring is passing before us, in all the blaze of the midday sun, we cannot admire everything as we should like to admire it. When evening shadows fall, and all the earth is still; when

flowers are closed and the birds are asleep, we can more fully realise their meaning and their grandeur, while we think upon the wonders of such an annual resurrection. We look back upon each little incident or scene, and see it again in our mind's eye, and then we may in measure grasp the lessons that Nature would teach. It is when the Brown Owl is hooting in the wood, and the Nightingale warbling his song of love and passion, that the mind becomes absorbed with the extreme beauty of the earth. We see the glorious pageant of spring under the strong rays of the sun, and admire it; but it is not until we come to quieter eventide that we appreciate it most, amid calmer surroundings.

VI

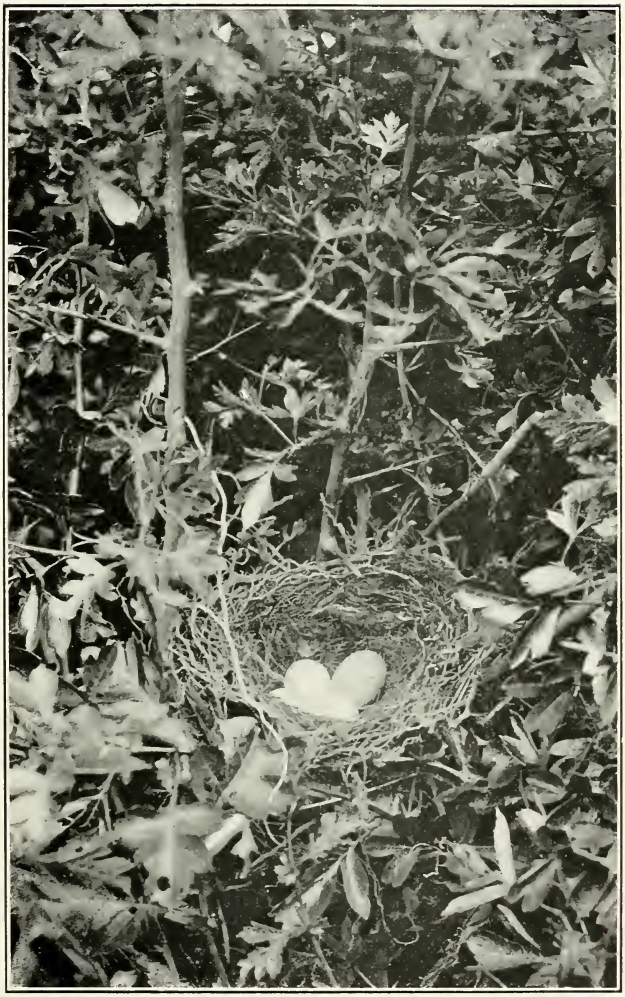
Round and about a Suburban Orchard
Part II. Summer

THE blossoms have faded and fallen; the decayed petals which covered the ground have disappeared; the leaves have assumed the darker green of summer. Numbers of birds are flying to and fro, carrying food to sitting mates; for, although summer has commenced, it is still a busy time in bird-land. Round and about this orchard I have known fifty-nine different species to breed. It is with five only of this number, however, that I wish to deal—viz., Cuckoo, Lesser Redpoll, Sky-Lark, Pied Wagtail, and Golden-crested Wren.

The average date for the Cuckoo to arrive in our northern suburb, according to my yearly notes, is April 18. Everybody is pleased when the Cuckoo's pleasantly reassuring note is first heard; for that is a true intimation that spring has really come. We are specially favoured with these birds. I have

not been able to discover how many frequent our woods and fields; but to judge by the constant calling from different points throughout a summer day, there must be a good many. One bird more particularly had a very remarkable note; this was the usual cry, but uttered in a much higher pitch. Not being a musician, I cannot give the key of this, but it often attracted the attention of persons curious in such matters. In the afternoon or evening the Cuckoo calls more frequently than is the case during earlier hours in the day. I believe that I hold the record of having heard the Cuckoo call the greatest number of times in succession. On June 12, 1900, I listened to one uttering its cry *Cuckoo*, or perhaps more correctly, *khoo-hoo*, four hundred and thirteen times. There were one or two very short pauses, to take breath, as it were, but with these exceptions, the bird kept on untiringly calling for the number of times stated. When I began to count, he had been at his performance some time; when I finished he made a pause of about a minute, and then recommenced without showing any symptoms of fatigue.

There is still much to be found out about the Cuckoo. I regret that I have had so few opportunities of observing its habits. Although there are so many individual birds about, nearly every nest that would be likely to contain one of their eggs



CUCKOO'S EGG IN GREENFINCH'S NEST (CUCKOO'S EGG ON THE RIGHT).

is always robbed, either by an egg-stealing bird, or by, what is far worse, one of the numerous bands of loafers who haunt the neighbourhood, and seem to get their chief pleasure in destroying nests; or even in the more brutal pastime of placing unfledged young on a gatepost or fence and then stoning the helpless little birds to death—this usually taking place under the eyes of the distracted parent birds. Notwithstanding its many genuine pleasures, there is much of sorrow and pain in bird-land to a humane naturalist.

Last spring I found a Greenfinch's nest with six eggs; it was in a well-concealed place, and I hoped would escape molestation. A few days later a Cuckoo placed her egg in the nest, at the same time removing two of the Finch's eggs. After taking much trouble, I was able to photograph this nest: the Cuckoo's egg is the one on the right; this was of a faint reddish-white ground colour, spotted almost equally all over with reddish spots, and was as far removed in resemblance from a Greenfinch's egg as almost any variety of the Cuckoo's. The nest was robbed a few days later by a bird, for the empty shells were still there.

The Cuckoo will sometimes place her egg in a nest before it contains any others, the usual result being, that the builders desert their chosen station when they find an egg in the nest before it is

finished. I am able to give an illustration of a Pied Wagtail's nest which contains a Cuckoo's egg.

CUCKOO'S EGG IN PIED WAGTAIL'S NEST.

This was built in ivy growing over a fence, which is always a favourite nesting-place of Pied Wagtails.

It was well concealed among large leaves, a curious thing being, that it was next to a gatepost, and each time the gate was shut the nest was shaken. A friend who showed me the nest thought this was probably the cause of it being deserted. I do not think the birds would have built the nest if they had objected to the vibration, as the gate was constantly being opened and closed while the nest was being constructed. I rather think it was the presence of the Cuckoo's egg before the nest was completed that caused it to be forsaken. While engaged in building, the Wagtails never flew directly to the nest, but entered the ivy a little to the left.

Pied Wagtails more than other birds seem to know where they are protected, and will build in suitable places in gardens close to a house. The nest pictured was near to a window; and the pretty habits of the graceful little birds caused a deal of entertainment to those who watched them. The Cuckoo's egg had a greenish-white ground colour, profusely speckled with greenish-brown and dark brown spots and faint grey undermarkings. The resemblance to a Pied Wagtail's egg was very marked, except in size, and this helped to distinguish it.

Although we have so many Cuckoos in this district, a young bird of this species is seldom seen.

I myself have never seen one in these parts ; but my friend Mr. Hanson once saw one sitting on a fence near my home. He watched it for awhile to see whether the foster-parents would feed it. Presently a Robin flew to the fence with a grub in her beak. The young Cuckoo opened his beak to its fullest extent, and the Robin then gave up the much wanted food. It was a ludicrous picture ; the Cuckoo seeming as if he might swallow such a foster-mother ; while the Robin on her part was apparently conscious that her head might be endangered if care was not taken while placing food in her hungry youthful protégé's mouth.

The Pied Wagtail, unlike other members of this family, seems to like the company of man. Several pairs breed in gardens round and about this orchard, and also alongside the stream which flows near. At all times the Pied Wagtail is a bird which attacts attention by its graceful gait and manners. They are an ornament to any garden which they frequent for building ; and if left alone they will return year after year to the loved and familiar haunt. In the beautiful garden belonging to my esteemed friend Mr. Gurlitt of Winchmore Hill a pair of this species successfully rear two broods in each successive spring. An ivy-covered arch spans one of the pathways, and although within a yard or two of the house, and bordering on a tennis court,

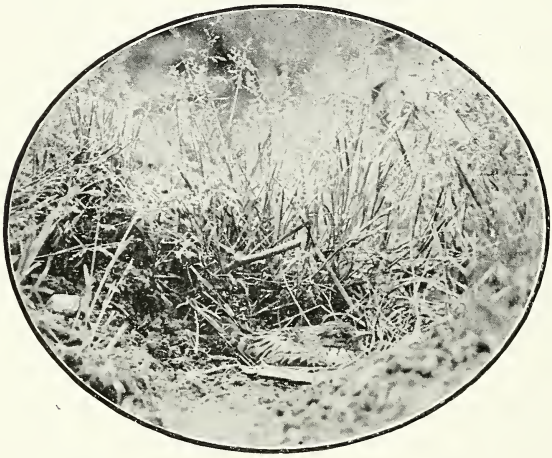
the birds are always quite at home. When people are in the garden the elegant little creatures do not heed them ; they run about on the lawns picking up food almost at the feet of those who prize them. I was able to get a good series of pictures of one of the adult birds. As a rule, when they fed their young they entered the arch at quite a different part from where the nest was, and at first I thought I should not be able to get a photograph of them. However, I fixed a piece of wood near the nest, and soon after it was up they settled on it before feeding their young. Both seemed a little shy of the camera and operator at first, but when they saw that neither would do them harm they would come near, and I had very little time to wait before exposing a plate.

PIED WAGTAIL.

There are many birds which choose the ground for a nesting site in the orchard, Blackbirds, Thrushes, and Robins being among the number. It is not often

that one of these succeeds, owing to labourers and boys taking the eggs. A Robin did succeed in hatching her eggs; but when this was accomplished the ground was ploughed and all the young perished. Sky-Larks try each year to rear a brood, and are more successful than some other birds. I was the means of saving one little nest full of young by bribing one who very much wanted to take the young and sell them. I made several attempts to photograph the Lark while sitting, exposing five plates in three days, only one, however, being satisfactory. Before I took the photograph I placed a heap of weeds near the nest and left it there some hours, and then hid the camera underneath. I stayed in a tree, and waited three hours: the Lark returned once, but seeing me flew away before I could take a picture. On the next day I again put the camera in position, and had one hundred feet of pneumatic tube attached to the shutter; I then left the camera in hiding, and returned a few hours later to release the shutter on the chance of the bird being there. I had to expose the plate from the length of the tubing distant from the camera, and therefore could not see whether the bird was on her nest. Still she was not sitting, however, so that I changed the plate and returned again later, and exposed another plate, but once more she left just before the shutter was released. Thus I had no success that day; but tried again on the morrow

in a similar way, with the result that another plate was wasted. I found that while sitting the bird could see me approach, and so left the nest before I reached the pneumatic ball. Finally I put another plate in the camera, and built a little wall of earth beyond the nest, so that the Lark should not see my approach;



SKY-LARK AT HOME.

and then, after a few hours, I again returned, and this time was successful in getting a photograph which well repaid all my trouble.

The Sky-Lark is one of our sweetest summer singers, and is a little bird which we could not do without. A meadow in springtime without a Lark would have its greatest charm missing. I once watched two

PUBLIC

Nest of Lesser Redpoll.

country yokels with guns. One of them had a large ten-bore, the other a twelve-bore breechloader. A Skylark rose near their feet, and began to soar above them. Both fired their two barrels at the singing bird; and, although it was not thirty yards above them, the singer escaped, and continued his song through the hail of shot and loud reports.

During winter months flocks of Redpolls frequent the orchard; but these leave when spring comes round. On May 21, 1899, I was delighted in finding that a pair had built in the orchard. While searching for nests, I found this very welcome one in a pear tree, and, on climbing up to it, I was glad indeed to see a Lesser Redpoll sitting in her beautiful little home. She even allowed me almost to touch her before she left, to disclose the five eggs. The photograph shows what a charming nest this was. It was built in some overhanging branches, being, as it were, suspended by three drooping boughs. The exterior was made of small twigs and grasses, the inside being very neatly lined with willow catkins and the finest hair. The five eggs were of a pale greenish-blue; two had no markings, the others having one or two reddish-brown spots. Altogether this was a choice nest, and although made by our smallest Finch, it was nevertheless the prettiest nest I have seen in this orchard. In the autumn and winter Redpolls eat an enormous number of seeds of such

troublesome plants to the farmer as the thistle, dandelion, groundsel, poppy, etc., etc. The winter habits of these birds are described elsewhere.

This chapter would not be complete without mention being made of the least of our British birds—the Golden-crested Wren. I have never found a nest in this neighbourhood myself, but have seen the birds in the breeding season in such situations as left no doubt that they were breeding near, and I was once told of two nests within a mile of this orchard.

There is a certain part in the New Forest, unhappily known to many collectors, where Goldcrests try to breed each year. A walk more than a mile long is bordered on each side by fir trees; beyond these, on each side, is an extensive piece of woodland. I walked up one side and down the other of this extended avenue, examined every tree, and began to think my search would be fruitless; when, at last, I found a nest on the last tree but three from the bottom. It was simply a matter of choice which side I should start searching, and quite naturally the wrong side was chosen. The photograph of this was not a success, owing to a rather strong wind which was blowing. The owners were very tame, and kept near the nest while it was photographed.

At all times of the year the orchard is a favourite hunting-ground for Goldcrests. When the leaves are falling is the best time to see them, for then they

are at their tamest. I have stood within a yard of them and watched them 'digging' into the bark of a fruit tree with their tiny beaks, after an insect. If the grub is not got at quickly it seems to annoy the operators, for they tap more rapidly, hop into a different position, and erect at intervals the deep gold feathers on their head; and at length, when the food is swallowed, they try another spot, and call *zee-zee-zee*, as they fly to it. Besides this call-note, the Goldcrest has a pleasing little song. One has to be close to hear it, however; for it is, as one would expect from such a tiny songster, a slight, but still attractive piece of music.

In early summer, although not so splendidly varied in colour as in the spring, the orchard is none the less delightful to a bird lover. When the songsters have their nests is the best time for observing their ways, and many a happy hour have I spent hiding among bushes or trees to watch the habits of the feathered inhabitants of this charming corner of North Middlesex. The orchard is well within the twelve-mile radius of London; but it still forms part of one of the most delightful stretches of Old England. It is part of the rural paradise which John Evelyn came down from London to see in the days of Charles II., and where he found a tract of country measuring twenty-five miles in circumference, and which then contained only three houses.

VII

A Woodland Scene in June

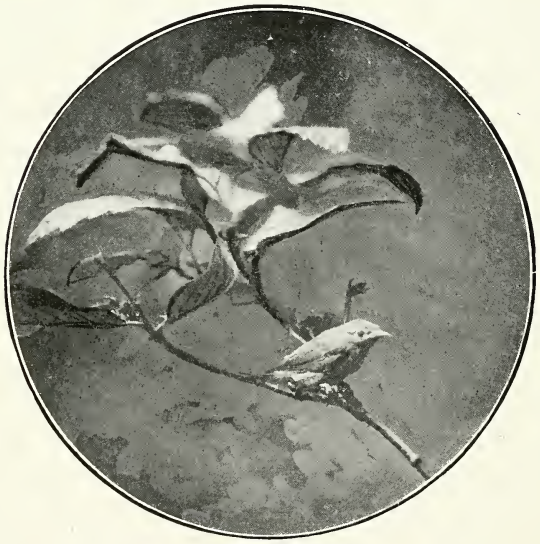
THIS is one of the first days of summer, if judged by warmth and sunshine; and the woodland bower in which I am sitting is mantled with wild roses and winding bines of briony. As the soft breeze, which, as it were, adds fresh life to the trees, sways their rustling branches, one may see something new in the infinite blue expanse above, and in the white cumulus clouds which float eastwards now high up over the wood. A thousand gleams of light penetrate the differently tinted leaves, and seem to dance over the flower-strewn carpet, forming a maze of glittering gold. Myriads of swaying flowers also catch the sunbeams and show a brighter lustre for a moment, and the light then dances to the grasses.

Hidden among the herbage is a Willow-Warbler; she calls *pu-i*, *pu-i*, and in a short time mounts to the slender branch of a young beech. *Pu-i*, *pu-i* she calls again, and flies on a little farther. There

is a rustling among the flowers, and an infant Willow-Wren emerges, and for the first time in its little life looks upon the beautiful woodland home that the Creator has given to birds to fly and roam about in at will. The young bird gives a short whistle and then flutters to its mother. Another rustle among the wild campion and tangled brambles, and others struggle out—seven in all.

The mother Warbler, with happy flutterings and loving whistles, gives them food, and presently her mate descends from a tree-top and also feeds his dependants. All the while, however, they attract their young farther and farther away from their nest. The little creatures, not being able to fly far, halt after each short flight, and while so resting I endeavoured to photograph them. Young Willow-Wrens seem to have a strong objection to having their picture taken, and prefer to hide in the thick herbage below while a camera is near. However, after waiting and keeping quiet, one Warbler, bolder than the others, settled upon a twig, and I was able to expose a plate. One of the old birds loudly scolded the fledgeling for being so venturesome as thus to show itself. If one can imagine expression in a young Willow-Wren's eyes, let him suppose the little creature to be looking as if quite ashamed of itself for thus risking its life.

When a picture had been taken, I caught one of the young birds and carefully tied it to a small branch and waited to see if its mother would feed it, as I wished for a photograph of her doing so. The parent kept flying round the captive, endeavour-



YOUNG WILLOW-WREN.

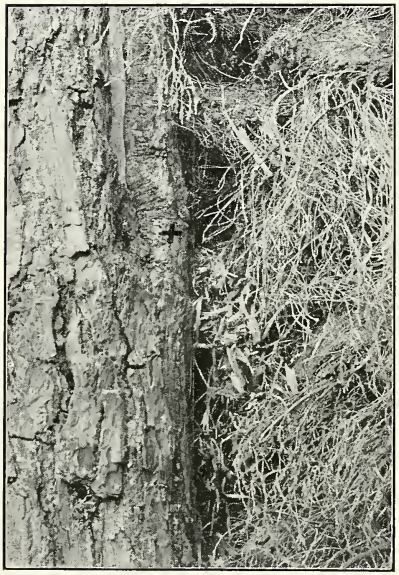
ing by all means in her power to induce it to fly; but the happy youngster kept on innocently squeaking, and asking for food. By way of refreshment I offered a few flies; but the parents showed such signs of distress and agony at the way I was treating their little one, that I released it, so as to

allow it, if willing, to fly after them. This young Warbler seemed to prefer my company, however, and therefore continued to sit close to me and to *cheep* at intervals.

From the trees above, and from the bushes beneath and around, came a concert of fairy-like music. The sweet air is filled with song. All the birds are singing. Blackcaps are the loudest, they are everywhere, and their pure, wild notes seem perfectly in harmony with the tangled and matted undergrowth, and the red and yellow flowers amongst which their slender nests are hidden.

A plaintive *seens, seens* now reaches me from a tree near, and two Tree-Creepers are seen running up a trunk. One has a moth in its beak, and the other watches me attentively. So close do they come, and so plaintively do they call, that I think their nest must be quite near. I walk a little farther afield, and sure enough there is the nest, near to where I was sitting, built between a piece of split bark and the tree. For some minutes I watch them while taking food to their young. How nimbly they can ascend the trees, and patiently 'work' at a part where an insect is hidden. The Tree-Creeper, as a rule, is always on the move; but I once saw, during a thunderstorm, how one could remain perfectly still for about three minutes. It was on the sheltered side of the tree, and perhaps it was

seeking shelter from the large drops, or it might have been paralysed by fright when a great clap of thunder just previously shook the wood. Some birds certainly do not seem to know what to do if startled by sudden noise; others will not even take much notice of a gun fired near them. I have seen Tits unconcernedly feeding during the firing of a gun quite close to them.



SITE OF TREE-CREEPER'S NEST.

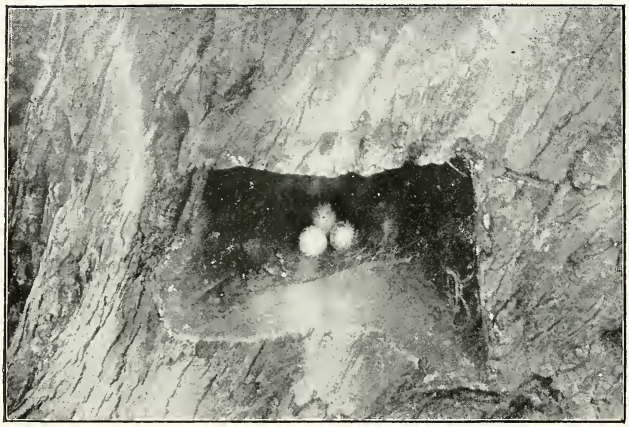
On the edge of a thick bush a Garden-Warbler has her nest, and while leaving she turned it half over. Two of the young fell out: one was killed, but the other had fallen on some soft moss, and the parents were feeding it. On my going near to pick up the unfledged bird, and to put the nest straight, both of the old birds became very restive and angry,

showing their anxiety in many characteristic ways. I replaced in the nest the young bird, and also fastened the nest more securely, so that a disaster should not happen again. Many birds when startled while sitting will tip their nests over ; I have known the Whitethroat and Garden-Warbler to do so several times. Three times during incubation have I fastened a Garden-Warbler's nest in its position because the sitting bird when leaving tipped it over. Some of the eggs fell out and were broken, but one young Warbler was successfully reared.

The scene in the wood at this best time of the year, is one of tranquillity and enjoyment. Besides the music of the birds the wood is merry with the buzzing of thousands of insects. Over the flowers a bright-coloured fly hovers for a few seconds, and then disappears, but is seen again a few feet away. Climbing slowly up a dead flower stem is an Orange-tip butterfly, just emerged from its chrysalis. Its wings are opened and closed several times, and then it launches out on its new flitting life, to live among the flowers. It is a real resurrection.

In the fir trees Pigeons coo softly one to the other, and now and then one flies to the ground to search for food. The majority go to the near-at-hand orchards to feed on currants which are now ripening. Turtle Doves *purr* in the thick hedge at the end of the wood, and a great clattering they make when

startled by my passing. Two Coal Tits are feeding their young; time after time they visit a hawthorn bush where a good supply of insects is to be found. Whatever time of the day we visit the woods we shall always see the Tits busy. They must destroy an enormous number of insects. The farmer who desires to get rid of destructive insects should encourage

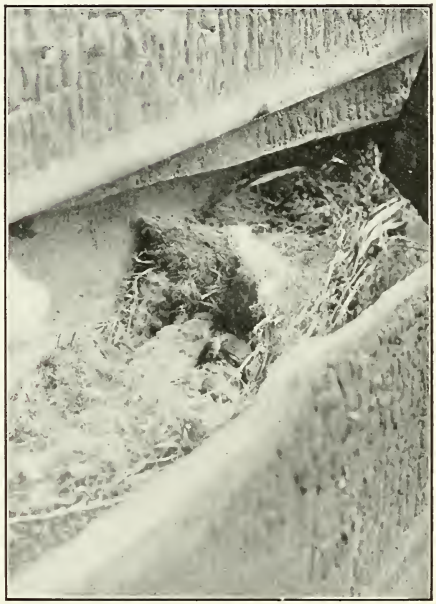


COAL TIT'S NEST. A SECTION IS CUT OUT OF THE TREE TO SHOW THE EGGS.

Titmice as much as possible. Market gardeners would find it would pay them to place boxes with a small hole in the side, in their fruit trees. If once Titmice can be induced to breed among fruit trees—where insects always abound—the pests will very soon diminish.

On the woodland border stands an old-time shed,

rough but picturesque. A small hole has been made in one of the tarred boards, and in that crevice between the outside and the inner boards, a Blue-Tit has reared her family. I gently pulled the board away so as to obtain a better view of them, and was surprised to see one of the old birds crouching in the farther corner. My attempting to touch her fledglings was resented by loud hissing and by snapping her beak, so that she really did all in her power to protect her brood. She was panting with fright herself, but would not leave the nest. This shows what loving care even a small bird can show for her young. And so it is throughout Nature: however small or insignificant the animal or bird may seem to



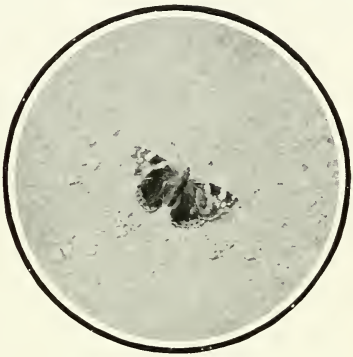
YOUNG BLUE-TITS IN NEST.

us, if we take the trouble to watch their habits, there will always be seen the presence of a more loving nature than we may have previously noticed.

Wandering to a more distant part of the wood, I come upon another scene. On one side rise the majestic beeches: their great gnarled branches stretching in all directions, and covered thickly with leaves, hide the blue canopy above from my eyes. A Nuthatch runs along a bough and utters his whistle, *tuwit*, and is then lost among the waving arms of green. Woodpeckers call and fly from beech to beech; the loud cry of the Yaffle or Green Woodpecker sounding among the giant trees adds to the charming wildness of the woods at this time. Very little vegetation thrives in the shade of these trees; I just catch sight of a herd of deer scampering away, and when at a safe distance they stop, turn round, and look at me, sniff the air and then run on. Beyond the beeches I reach the dusty road; going down this a little way we turn up a hill, and when at the top a view of the wood can be seen.

A vast green expanse of all shades stretches before me, and in the hollow nestles a small village. The red-tiled roofs and white chimneys peep out from among the trees, and away to the right stands a disused windmill. The brown thatching of the old stacks, and the new one, half finished, with the men

at work on it, help to make the scene more homely. Still farther, beyond the hamlet, stretches the wood, trees beyond trees, green and fresh, gently swaying in the glorious sunlight; and then far beyond these, dim, remote and blending in with the hazy summer sky, lie a chain of hills.



RED-ADMIRAL BUTTERFLY.

All of these sylvan scenes make up a series of contrasts which are charmingly beautiful; the small hazy hills, the red roofs of the villagers' homes among the trees, and the varied tints of the latter, from fresh green oak leaves to the grey colour of the willows near the farmhouse. These are beautiful, it is true; but there is something which adds a greater charm to the whole scene. In a thick bush on the hot roadside a

RED-ADMIRAL AT REST.

Blackcap sings his wild notes, and a Chiffchaff calls from a higher tree. Ring Doves fly swiftly over the tree tops, and the air is filled with the best of harmony—the music of the birds. Down the road flutters a Red-admiral Butterfly, it settles on the dust for a moment and then flits on. A rustling by the roadside, and a squirrel runs out, crosses the road and runs up a tree. A thousand-and-one other little incidents are always happening in the countryside, and all make the woods more than mere trees and flowers, grass and birds, and the dry dusty roads more joyful.

HUMBLE BEE ON THISTLE FLOWER.

VIII

Harvest-Time in Hertfordshire

I AM standing in the midst of golden-coloured shocks of sheaves, for it is harvest-time in a favourite county. The sun looks down on us in glorious splendour from a sky of deepest blue; his hot rays are thrown on to the ripe corn, which seems to reflect them and to increase the seasonable warmth. How many tints of yellow are here! yonder the deep copper of wheat contrasts with the lighter silver-yellow of barley; while oat straws drooping modestly have their own peculiar hue. But the tints change when a cloud glides up to shade the sun; the shadow is but for a few moments, the scene again alters to what it was when the glistening shadow-waves of gold played over the surface of the fields.

Over the corn a Sparrow-Hawk is sailing; a Corn-Bunting flies from the wheat; but the large bird above makes an ominous movement, and the Bunting, scenting an enemy, darts back to the shelter

of the corn, and remains there until the threatening Hawk is far away.

The greensward of the sides of the otherwise dusty Great North Road is one mass of blue. Field scabious grows thick almost everywhere; while the prettier and more delicate harebell fills up spaces where the former is more scant. Higher up on the wayside bank a thick growth of yellow meets the eye —bird's-foot trefoil grows here luxuriantly. If we turn up the thick grass, this plant is still seen trailing over the ground.

Leaving the high road, and taking a side turning to the left, we pass through a hamlet consisting of half a dozen white cottages and the inevitable beer-shop. Round about the houses, and up and down the narrow street, Martins are flying. Under the eaves of the low dwellings they have their nests; and each time a bird returns with supplies two little heads pop out of the nest and two eager little beaks are opened wide, expectantly awaiting their meal. Just beyond the hamlet is a way-side pond with several Ducks lazily enjoying the water, and ashore are two clamouring Geese strutting about as if they were masters of land and water alike. One cottage nestles amongst a garden of fruits and flowers, and then we are in a wild, lonely lane.

Hertfordshire lanes are of perennial interest to me.

I love them and never could tire of wandering between their flowery hedgerows. Not only are there flowers and birds here: the glorious sense of wildness and liberty which they inspire charms and stimulates. Take the scene now looked upon. Down the gently sloping lane Swallows glide about, until lost sight of round the curve. Two Pied Wagtails fly up when startled by footfalls, and then again settle farther afield. These are feeding on flies, which are attracted by an abundance of flowers. But the most delightful parts of the lane are the hedges which bound it. These natural fences are not the regular primly kept hedges of suburban road sides; they are real wild growths which look as if they might be counterparts of hedges in fairy tales.

Wild clematis hangs in festoons, and the lane on each side is tinted white with the innumerable small flowers. Here and there are pink and white blossoms of the dewberry and blackberry. Some of the berries are just turning from red to black. Where the bushes are not hidden by clematis, nuts are visible; but these, like the blackberries, are still unripe, and need two weeks more of this harvest sun. Round the curve the scene again alters. Briony takes the place of clematis for some distance, and bunches of red berries hang in clusters. The road-side sward is wider here, and red poppies outnumber

the harebells. Charlock and shepherd's purse also flourish; and Finches will have a good feed in autumn when the plaintain seeds are ripe. Wild parsnips thrive in the ditch, the yellow umbelliferous flowers stand high above the grass, and in some places nearly top the hedge. Some of the taller plants are almost hidden by masses of wild convolvulus, which in some places seems to threaten to bind almost everything with its bonds, showing by way of recompense beautiful white flowers.

The commonest birds here are undoubtedly Yellow Hammers. Upon every tree, or higher part of the hedge, one is to be seen unceasingly uttering its song *che-che-che-che-che-che-che-swee-e-e-ter*. The banks on each side of the road are the places in which the Yellow Hammer loves to hide its nest; and judging by the number of young birds great numbers must be reared. Now and then Whitethroats pop out of the flower-covered roadside, hover a second to catch a fly, and then disappear as silently as they came. When summer was younger they caught insects in the same manner, but then they uttered a short jerky song as they fluttered over the hedge-top.

We leave the lane and enter a cornfield. A reaping machine at work quickly makes the great square of standing corn less and less. As the machine passes along, a flock of Swallows follow, some keeping quite near to the horses to pick up

flies which are roused from the ground; but the greater number fly backwards and forwards, just over the windmill-like arms of the reaper, for there they get insects which fly from the falling straw.

Narrow tracks, like miniature footpaths, wind about amongst the standing wheat. These are made by hares, and occasionally one dashes out, and bolts across the field where the corn is cut; for as the area of standing straw becomes smaller, they make their escape one by one, though many fall victims to sportsmen, who are in waiting. Hares are different from rabbits in this respect, for the latter, when in a field which is being cut, crowd together until they find themselves in the centre, and then when the reaping machine gets close they all bolt together. Several large and promising coveys of Partridges rise as we pass along; others are young and as yet weak on the wing. We even discover a nest of young just out of their eggs. What pretty fluffy little birds they are!—and although only just hatched they are quite capable of looking after themselves; for they will run off in different directions to hide, and in a very short time not one is to be seen. The old birds do their level best to attract an intruder away by interesting little dodges, such as feigning lameness or a broken wing. Wood-Pigeons frequent these corn-fields, and settling on the shocks, they look like great birds as they rise; for they are

so intent on procuring food as not to notice us until quite near. With them are small flocks of Turtle Doves, which in some respects are favoured birds; for many sportsmen consider it unlucky to shoot them. What a good thing it would be for our rarest birds if *they* were considered sacred—as indeed, in this sense, they ought to be.

Where the corn has been cut for some days, poppies spring up in great profusion; certain fields having the appearance of being carpeted with scarlet. At some distance is a flock of Rooks eating corn; the shocks being surrounded by a sea of red poppies, some of the birds being nearly concealed as they search for grain among stubble and waning flowers. Others stand on the sheaves and help themselves plentifully. Suddenly there is a startling gun report from that direction: the Rooks rise, cawing loudly, and ascend in circles to a great height, and then fly in straggling parties to another quarter. Dotted about among the poppies are patches of veronica; this was in flower when the corn was young, and its lovely blue petals will still win admiration. As a harbinger of spring, the germander speedwell is always gladly welcomed; and when early autumn tints the landscape with gold, it still flowers and remains to see summer fade away.

Reaping is now generally done by machine; one or two farms, however, still use the more old-fashioned

hook or sickle. In one field on our left, reapers can be seen at their labours in the hot sun; and though the work may look to be slow and easy, any one who has tried it for a day would have all doubts removed regarding its being very hard task-work. A main part of the binding is now also done by machine. As the reaping and binding machine passes along, the ground is left perfectly clear; not a stalk of straw is seen lying among the dry stubble. This is a great advantage to the farmer; but poor gleaners cry out against having privileges curtailed which usage from time immemorial has apparently established as a right.

Leaving the fields, we again take to the road, and ascend a hill, on the summit of which another sylvan scene is looked upon. It is now evening, and "the golden-tressed sun," in his retinue of copper and red clouds, slowly sinks behind hills covered with ripe corn. There are two distinct rows of hills, and beyond these a higher range. When the sun is low down, and seeming, as it were, almost to touch the ridges of the hills, a yellow efflorescence hides the intervening country. The sun passes from view, and the haze disappears, and we can discern more perfectly the characteristics of the landscape. A village lies amongst the trees towards the west; but a house or two and the church spire alone can be seen. The musical tones of the bells of the church

clock can be faintly heard as their sound travels up the hill-side. At the stroke of eight all harvest workers leave the fields, and many pass up the hill. Boys in charge of horses sing merrily as they homeward go, astride the great well-kept animals. The procession of workpeople slowly files down the opposite side of the hill until lost sight of in the valley.

Twilight quickly comes on; the breeze drops; perfect stillness seems to settle on the land, and a blue mist rises over the more low-lying fields. This is the time, however, fully to realise the charm and beauty of Old Hertfordshire. Everything has apparently yielded to evening calm; we stand and commune with Nature; we are conscious of being fascinated in a way it is impossible to describe. Would that I could more often roam about these wild lanes, lonely woods, and fruitful fields! The time spent in doing so always seems to be too short; the days fly by too quickly.

The fields and woods, as seen by day, are made musical by the many voices and sounds of the countryside. At night these are not heard; but still the meadows and dark figures of trees seem to softly speak of things which belong alone to peace and solitude. So do also the now dimly seen fields of standing corn, or those where there are long rows of wheat shocks. Above all this solitude there hangs

the still more mysteriously silent canopy of heaven, tenanted with its thousands of stars. It is not until we fix our eyes on these, that we realise the majesty and greatness of Nature—the works of God.

Away yonder, over the darkening woodland, the moon is rising, to shed another kind of light on everything. Long shadows pass across road and field; the rows of wheat shocks are now made even weird by their own stretching shadows thrown across the stubble. But as the moon rises higher, a new world seems to open to us. We see that, although the country is so silent at night, it is nevertheless very full of life. Not far away there is a hare: it stands long to look at a human intruder; but by remaining perfectly motionless the animal gains confidence and comes onward, passes through a gap in the hedge, crosses the road, and enters a field of standing corn. Any one who has wandered about the open country at night will have noticed how lightly all birds and animals sleep. Partridges are calling now, as they were earlier in the evening, and ever and anon the cry of a startled Lapwing comes from a neighbouring field. A dark form slinks along in the shadow of a hedge. When closer, this is seen to be a fox; he has something in his mouth. A slight movement brings Reynard to a stand; but only for a moment, for, without hesitation, he turns and seems to fade away in the shade beyond. Some rabbits are playing in

the moonlight; their white scuts are just visible as they skip about. A loud hissing is heard above; and, looking up, a White Owl is seen to enter a corn-field, and slowly 'beat' between the rows of sheaves, and at last it settles to wait a long time for its prey. Although light is dim, we can just see the Owl. Then suddenly there is a rapid movement; he settles on the ground; there is a loud, sharp, short squeak, followed by an ominous fluttering, and the Barn-Owl flies away with his prey.

SPIDER.

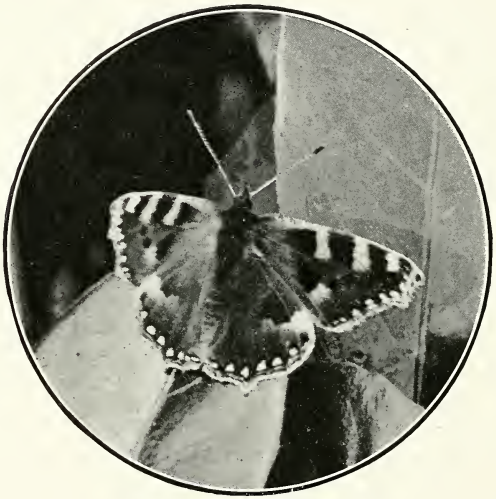
IX

Late September in Dorsetshire

THE sighing wind, as it plays among trees and hedges in the valley, rises to the green hill-tops in a musical undertone. On the hills the pines receive the fitful autumn breeze and pass it on to where it searches all parts of the beech wood still higher up, causing squirrels to pause every now and then in their scamper over the still leafy branches. A large flock of Sea-gulls feeding in a newly ploughed field lazily rise when they see an intruder, and slowly fly to ground a little farther on. Linnets twitter from the hedges, which have a heavy crop of very fine luscious ripe blackberries. No one need travel hungry in these Dorsetshire lanes during the latter half of September, for bushes are overladen with quantities of fruit, which in the main goes to waste, although many a town housewife would be glad to have some of the spoil for winter use.

Three Goldfinches fly past and settle on a hedge

lower down ; a few liquid notes are uttered, and they flutter onward. Nuts hang in bushes on the hazel stems, and sloes diversify the hedgerow in places with their purple-blue tint. Clouded-yellow butterflies fly on before along the lane, accompanied by Painted-



TORTOISESHELL BUTTERFLY.

ladies, Tortoiseshells, Red-admirals, and Blues. Round and about a rick-yard by the roadside, a covey of Partridges are feeding ; they rise altogether, their loud flight scaring a company of Peewits. In this out-of-the-way West country the stacks of corn are built in or near the fields where it grew, and not close to

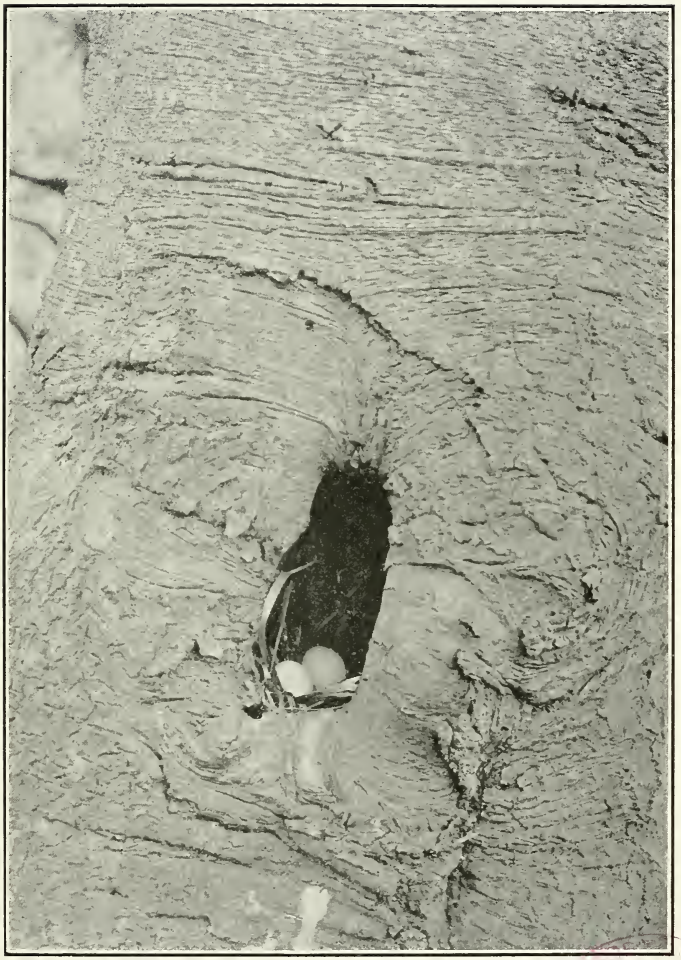
the homestead, as is the case on smaller farms. In different parts of the vast landscape, as seen from our commanding coign, rows of golden-coloured ricks can be descried, some of them containing seven or eight stacks. Partridges dearly love to feed about these ricks, and nearly every one we pass seems to have its covey.

The roadsides are lined with drifted thistledown and 'old man's beard' from the wild clematis. The effect from a short distance is as if the greensward was covered with hoar-frost. Some of the spots in the fruit-laden hedges are white with snowberries, and although it is quite a hot day, in places one might imagine we were looking on a winter scene. Overhead floating stars of brightest silver are drifting along, these being thistle seeds on their travels; some are high aloft, others low down. Most, if not all, of these have come from the other side of the valley, thus showing what a long distance, seed from a thistle will travel. The highest seem as if they might drift for hours, and it would be no exaggeration to say that many seeds grown in one county will find their growing site in another many miles away.

On the thatched roof of what was once a dwelling-house, but is now a broken-down shanty, there sits a Yellow Wagtail; he darts hither and thither and all over the thatch, picking up flies as quickly as thought; sometimes he 'hawks' for them in the air, turning all

sorts of queer somersaults before he returns to the thatch. Then a Spotted Flycatcher, which has nested near, considers that this old house is his own preserve; but he does not seem to object to the Wagtail's presence, providing this interloper does not approach too closely. When another Flycatcher settles on the roof, however, he is immediately attacked by the other. Flycatchers fight in an interesting manner; one does not do much damage to its opponent; each combatant rather contents itself by raising its wings above its back to their fullest extent, and uttering a few angry notes of defiance. Time after time this intruding Flycatcher flies to the roof, but is always driven away by the one in possession.

A Red-admiral Butterfly floats along the hedgeside, and while admiring its graceful, buoyant flight, I hear a Redshank calling. Thinking it rather strange to hear such a bird on a high hill, I tried to discover its whereabouts. Although the cry *theu-li theu-li* continued, I could not see a Redshank; but at last I spied a Starling on the roof of a barn: it was this bird giving forth this mimic call, the notes being so perfectly given that they thoroughly deceived me. The Starling can repeat any notes of other birds. I have heard them imitating the Swallows' song among many others; but the most curious example I ever met with was one which frequented a wood at



STARLING'S NEST.

LIBRARY

Winchmore Hill, and which used actually to *quack*. There were some Ducks which had strayed on to a stream near, and this entertaining Starling, evidently thinking that their language was too attractive to be quite ignored, took up the notes quickly and correctly.

As I reach the hill-top, the greensward on the roadside gradually widens until the whole road is covered with grass; so that what was once a frequented road is now a green track a little worn by farm waggons. A few harebells stand among the long grass; their pretty blue bell-shaped flowers nod to the passing breeze. Harts-tongue ferns grow in abundance on banks below the hedges. Field scabious and red campion are seen in what was once the high road; both of these plants are small and stunted, some of the former stand only two inches high. Among the blackberries are many flowers, the ripe fruit and blossoms in some cases being on one stem together. A gate across the road stops further progress in this direction. Beyond is a large meadow containing a flock of sheep. A Magpie flies across the field from one copse to another, and a Jay follows in his path. A great flock of Starlings suddenly rise from different parts; but all of these at once congregate together. Then they perform those strange evolutions peculiar to this species. No drilled army could excel them in the beauty of their combined movements. A flight

forward is made, then a sudden turn to the right, the manœuvre being executed so exactly in point of time-keeping, that only a very thin line is seen. Now they look like a compact square as they dash upwards, and again some wonderful turns and twists are performed, each bird doing his part as perfectly as though it had enjoyed years of training. In the middle of one exercise it seems as if a sudden word of command was given, for instantly the whole flock opens out in extended order and drops down to the ground, some settling—the majority, however, preferring to rest on the backs of the sheep. These marvellous evolutions are to me one of the most striking phenomena of the bird world.

Retracing my steps and taking a side turning, the valley is reached, and another and much higher hill is on ahead. After a long but interesting climb, I find myself on the summit, the view being one which well repays for any toil in climbing. Far away in the south, almost hidden by haze, lies the town of Dorchester. It looks like a small village among the trees; while real villages look like mere dots in the wide extending landscape. A white patch gleams in the sun in the east, and through a field-glass this turns out to be the white cliffs of the Hampshire coast, although the sea-line cannot be distinguished, being blended with the sky. The smoke of a steamer far out at sea can be seen.

Looking across several lower hills and neighbouring valleys, the tops of the Somersetshire Quantock hills can be discerned, while in another direction a part of Devonshire shows itself between two hills. Thus we can gaze into four of the most beautiful of English counties from this hill,—truly a magnificent view!

A FAVOURITE HAUNT OF SWIFTS—DORSETSHIRE.

I spoke to a rustic on the beauty of the scene, and was struck with his reply: 'Well, zir, there ain't much to zee hereabouts, nawthin' 'cept rabbits.' This also proves that familiarity breeds contempt.

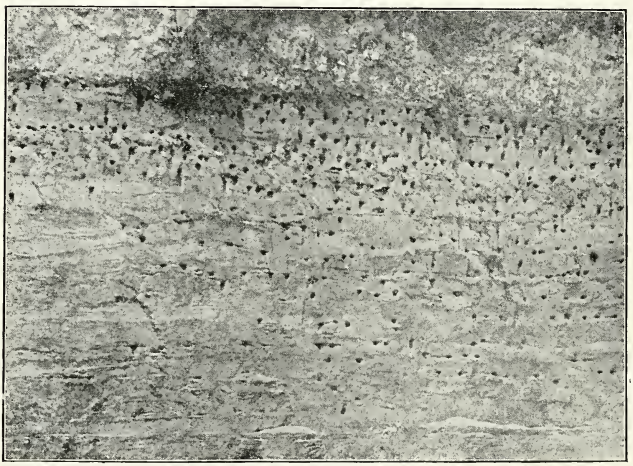
Again descending the hill I enter a valley containing a long, straggling village. The thatched barns and cottages give splendid nesting-sites for Swifts.

Although these birds have now left the village for their southern homes, many of their old nests can be found, and I was told that great numbers breed thereabouts. House-Martins on some of the cottages still had young birds in their nests (September 23rd). This seemed remarkably late, yet there were many nests with young that looked as though they had not long been hatched.

Most of the cottages are built on one side of the road only. For some distance a steep bank rises from the roadway, and Sand-Martins' old nesting-holes are here and there bored into the sand slope. My photograph was obtained in the New Forest, where there are several very fine retreats suitable for these birds. In the picture only a small part of the sand cliff shows; but there must have been over a thousand holes tenanted by Sand-Martins, in addition to many occupied by Sparrows and Starlings. When I visited this colony most of the birds had young, and it was a busy scene that I looked upon. Hundreds and hundreds of Sand-Martins were flying overhead, carrying food to their nests; it seemed remarkable how they knew their respective holes. With their harsh twittering, and the whistling Starlings and chattering Sparrows, there was a deal of bird-talk to be heard.

To return to Dorsetshire. Over the valley a flock of Swallows and Martins is flying. Before leaving

this country the old birds and their young flock together and perform many aerial evolutions. They often settle on the single telegraph wire ; there must be over a hundred in a row ; some are preening their feathers ; the younger birds seem to have a difficulty in keeping their balance.



SAND-MARTINS' NESTING-HOLES.

This part of the country is rich in Roman earthworks, especially round Dorchester. The 'old folks'' works, some of the natives call them. I was standing on one of these ancient mounds on the summit of a hill near Dorchester in the quiet autumn evening. After sunset flock after flock of Lapwings

passed overhead; the light was so deceiving that the birds looked as large as Herons, and indeed I thought they were such at first sight. Over the glowing western sky a great flock of Starlings were performing their wonderful manœuvres.

In the great plain and valley below three villages could be seen. Cows and sheep were grazing in the fresh-looking meadows alongside the winding river Frome. The cattle appeared to be no larger than ants as they wandered about. Now and then the bleating of a sheep came faintly from the hillside. And so the daylight faded, the river resembling a streak of silver shining from amongst its dark surroundings. But even evening and night are cheerful when we homeward go with sunny memories of a day spent with wild Nature in the beautiful West.

X

Autumn in Bird-Land

DEAD leaves strew the ground on all sides, making a yellow carpet, reminding one as they come down that summer does not die without leaving a still beautiful reminder of her late ascendency. All the trees of the wood seem as if they were making one supreme united effort to rival the charm of past and fresher seasons of the circling year by giving one gorgeous many-tinted display before they finally part with their now dying foliage. It is as if the beauty of summer's dress were concentrated in each small leaf,—yet here are millions, and each one is a varied coloured gem. Each tree is a Nature picture painted with delicate tints of russet, red and yellow, and here and there spotted with the addition of deep crimson. No human artist's pencil could adequately depict this outlook. The half-bare branches speak of past sunny days; they revive memories of summer and of the still brighter days of spring.

How much has happened in this wood since these falling leaves first opened to the beams of spring sunshine! Seeds have germinated and brought forth flowers, and these in their turn have produced seeds which are now hidden under decaying foliage where they will rest until that mysterious life resurrection again takes place. Birds have come from foreign lands; they have made their nests, reared their young, and have returned with these across those thousands of miles which separate their summer home and their winter retreat. Millions of insects have passed through their prescribed stages, have done their part in life and passed away. Each tree, bush, as well as every square yard of ground, has been a world in itself, and a home for countless tiny creatures. Myriads of insects are now searching for warm or sheltered places in which to pass the winter months while in that mysterious state we call hibernation. Thousands more will sleep in the chrysalis state until the landscape is again dressed in its mantle of green, and the warmer days and sunshine of spring transform a sleeping world into one of active life and wonderful beauty.

Wherever we may now turn in the wood, we come upon a bush or a tree which seems to be more variously coloured than those around. Of certain individual examples it is difficult to tell which is the most beautiful. For delicacy of tints I think the

elms more than hold their own ; but these are of one colour only—a pale yellow. Birches are the most pleasing to look upon ; for among their changing leaves we seem to see the three seasons reflected. There are, as it were, the fresh green tints of spring ; the darker green of summer ; the gold russet or bronze of autumn.

Standing out here and there are one or two small clumps showing the deepest possible golden hues. Some of the larger birches were cut down, leaving the roots in the ground, and numerous offshoots have appeared on these stumps, the leaves being of the richest colour in the wood. Acorns, and especially oak leaves, strew every part of the ground ; and it is impossible for any bird to hop about without being heard. Perfect stillness reigns among the trees ; not a leaf moves on the boughs, some are shaken down by birds. One can even tell where the birds are by falling leaves. Titmice searching for food also cause many to fall ; and when a larger bird settles in a tree its weight may cause quite a little shower of leaves to come down, to float slowly away and then to settle and help to cover the woodland path.

Occasionally it seems as if footsteps are approaching; but this rustling is caused by Blackbirds moving about under bushes, where they scratch the leaves away, clear a space, and then pick up insects. I have

seen a Coal Tit acting in a similar manner; but instead of scratching, each leaf was removed with its beak until a space was cleared, and after completing this rather tedious work for such a small bird, it fed on insects which had been in hiding underneath. Cock Blackbirds repeatedly leave the shelter of bushes and bring their numerous followers into the open spaces; several hens sometimes follow their mates, and the latter look well after their lighter coloured companions, and if needful they will fight to protect them. When almost dark we still hear them in the hedgerows calling *pick-pick* to each other; and if disturbed, they will utter their loud alarm notes, without flying away, as they do when it is lighter.

The bracken still affords shelter for rabbits, which will lie until almost trodden upon, but will then dash out and hie away at full speed. The tall fern-like leaves are many-coloured, making up a picture of beauty that defies description; dark and light green, gold, russet, and white, pale yellow, and red, all blend together and form one soft harmonious whole. The eye cannot long confine itself to one single spot; we have to look at the scene as a whole, with the exception of places here and there, where a tall plant stands out which is of a deeper bronze or a more striking crimson. Beyond the bracken is the moor, covered with purple heather. It is relieved by a

yellow tree here, and three russet-garbed oaks yonder, and then is interspread with patches of lovely bracken.

Peewits are flying low and settling beyond the furze bushes. A Snipe rises at my feet and darts away, and presently is out of sight. Above, a Lark sings his simple but sweet song. What a glorious landscape all of this must appear to be from his lofty point of view! no wonder, therefore, that he sings! The notes are not so loud as they were in the spring; and although he is at no great height, they are not very distinct. A Magpie leaves the wood and 'drops' across to the oaks, 'chucking' as he flies. Cock Pheasants are calling defiantly, and from the heather the notes of a solitary Partridge that has escaped the guns can also be heard.

In the wood there is suddenly a great commotion. Two squirrels are playing among the trees. They do not see me, and I am able to get closer, and then, while in hiding, I wait and watch their gymnastic exercises. They are in a pine tree; one is on each side of the stout trunk clinging to the wood about a yard from the ground. Each is in a state of expectant excitement, and often peeps round to see whether its playmate is visible. One moves its tail, the other sees the movement, and rushes round the tree, but does not succeed in catching it. Round and round they go, tearing off pieces of bark in their

wild scamper; then they rush up one side of the tree and down the other. One then runs along the ground, frisks about, and still eludes its playmate; then again he runs up the tree and waits, looking down at the other below. For a moment the latter seems to wonder where the other may be; but suddenly seeing it, he leaps on to the tree and nearly succeeds in catching the one aloft. Again both return to the ground, and roll over and over in playful ardour, and then again rush up the trunk, their tails seeming to float behind them as they leap from branch to branch. A Starling settles near, but takes no notice of these interesting frolics. And so the squirrels keep on until I move, the effect being almost magical. Casting just a glance in my direction, they both hasten up the tree, run along the topmost branches, leap to the next tree, and so on until I can see them disappearing along their leafy pathway.

So silent is the wood after this seasonable performance that the leaves can be heard rustling as they fall. A heavy dew is settling on everything; drops of water hang on the leaves, and slowly dropping they cause other leaves to fall. Several holly bushes stand in a distant corner, and hundreds of Sparrows have chosen this for their roosting place, and as each one is *cheeping*, the noise is deafening for a short time.

When the yellow light from the setting sun gives place to dull grey twilight, Sparrows cease their calls,

and the brown Wren utters his last rattling song. Then it is that silence reigns over woodland and moor alike. Not the more cheerful hush of an evening in spring, but rather a sad, cold stillness, more in keeping with a dying day of the shortening year. It is also quite different from the silence of a summer evening, when Nature seems to be lightly sleeping. Everything around is now grey ; night's ghostly shadows creep on to envelope the coloured landscape of day in a more sombre mantle. At last deathlike silence hangs about the trees, and the drop of a falling acorn is startling. Everything seems dead ; Nature is waiting for a revival.

A few more days pass and the trees are altogether bare. The bracken has lost its beauty ; the woodland floor is deeply strewn with rotting leaves. The cold north wind comes through the naked branches. Later in the evening a flake of snow falls, and a few minutes later this harbinger of winter is followed by others. A lonely Robin heralds the approaching harder times with a few plaintive notes—an apology for a song—and memories of golden autumn seem to fade away with his strain. For the time being more sunny seasons seem to lie buried under the snow which now covers the ground.

XI

Birds in the Snow

IN some respects the best time of the circling year for observing and photographing certain kinds of birds is when the ground is covered with a mantle of snow. Hunger subdues the wildest of animals into tameness, and this is especially true of the feathered tribes. By using due caution, in hard weather a field naturalist can closely approach even such a wary bird as the Carrion-Crow or Kestrel; while others more sociable, such as Robins, will even come to the open window, or actually feed from one's hand.

During the winter of 1899-1900, I gave much attention to photographing birds in the snow; I obtained many pictures and watched the birds' habits in what were their hard times. There is fascinating interest in taking careful notice of these wild birds in their homes, and in observing what I call their manners and customs, especially when the little creatures themselves are not conscious that they are

being watched. When a bird knows of our presence, it always behaves differently from what would be

SPARROWS.

the case if no one was near ; so that when naturalists or others take their ornithological notes, or notice

the habits of any wild creature, I always think that they should be unobserved, otherwise the behaviour of the bird or wild animal is not natural, and does not correctly show their everyday habits. Of course this remark applies to the camera; and sometimes there is considerable difficulty in concealing from a bird such a formidable-looking machine. Most of the pictures accompanying this chapter were obtained in a suburban garden within the London ten-mile radius. In one corner of the grounds was a quantity of rubbish, bricks, pieces of wood, etc., and the camera was hidden underneath, the whole being then covered with a layer of frozen snow. The small opening left for the lens was a matter of some disquietude to a Robin, which would sit on the covering carefully to examine it before venturing to touch the food, which was placed near to attract such unsuspecting visitors.

Of all outdoor winter friends Robins are perhaps the most interesting. They are very pugnacious, and when winter quarters are chosen, which usually will be a garden, they fight desperately with others of their own species which may dare to intrude into the chosen domain, and will at times even drive away birds larger than themselves. It was exceedingly amusing to watch one little monarch of the garden, as he might have been called, whose delight was to eat all the food he could, and then to perch on

some prominent object and survey the grounds. Any other birds that approached would be angrily driven away; the only intruders which dared to dispute his sway were some Starlings; and when these came down in force their quarrelsome chattering evidently frightened Cock-Robin. This Redbreast

ROBIN, MONARCH OF ALL HE SURVEYS.

gave about as good an illustration of greediness as it would be possible to find in the bird world. When he had eaten all he could, he would remain on the spot to prevent other hungry birds from touching the food that remained. In the picture taken, he will be seen on a mound of snow thus on guard. Another Robin would approach, sit for a time on

a fence and call plaintively. If the other saw this trespasser he would be on the alert, and sometimes would actually hide in a thick evergreen hedge, so that just as the hungry one was on the point of taking a piece of bread, the other would make a dash and drive him far from the garden.

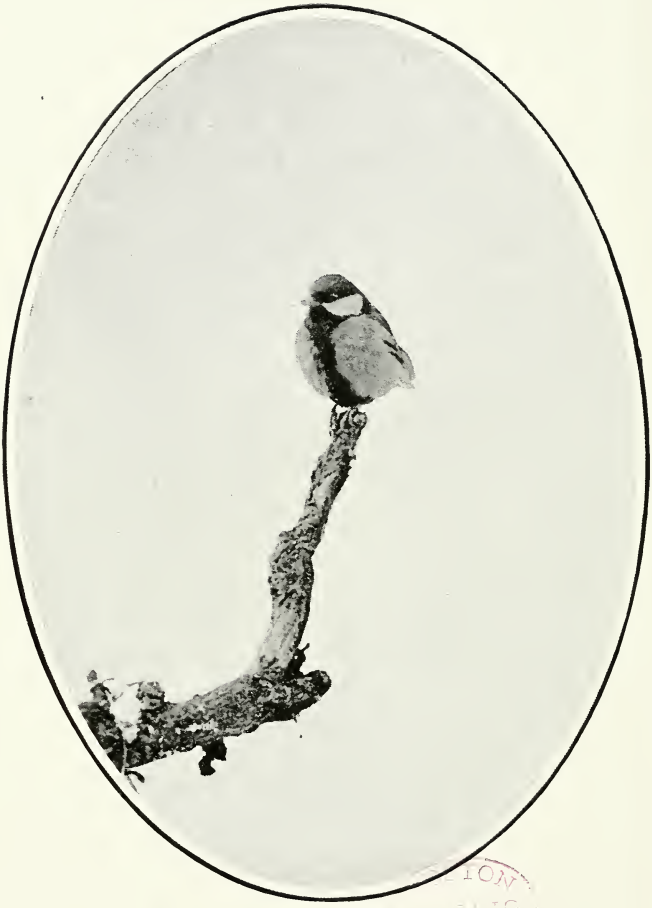
One morning I put my camera in position and focussed a dead branch, on which a piece of fat was fastened in hope of attracting Titmice. I was making an attempt to photograph a Great-Tit, but had this vicious Robin to contend with, and feared he would baffle my endeavours. He would insist on sitting on the branch to guard the food, of which he had himself eaten his fill. Another Robin in a neighbouring tree had been watching its greedy relation for some few minutes, and at last this one made a bold move, first settling higher up on the branch. I squeezed the pneumatic ball and released the shutter just at the right moment; and thus readers will be able to see these two Robins in a very characteristic attitude,—each, as it were, pausing for a moment and taking stock of its antagonist before actually coming to blows. I was only just in time, however, for they were instantly inextricably mixed up, and it seemed as if their duel would be a fight to the death. I could not find out which came off as victor; for they both left the garden still fighting; but in due time one of the combatants

DEFIANCE,—COCK ROBINS ABOUT TO FIGHT.

reappeared, and, as became him, very much subdued by such a tragic adventure.

Not long after the above little incident I saw two Robins in a road, each sitting on a fence. Their feathers were ruffled, and both appeared to be cold and hungry. I threw a small piece of meat on to the ground to see what the result would be. The whole appearance of both birds immediately changed; both flew to the food, which, however, neither dared to touch, and there they stood, with heads bent down and wings slightly opened, in an attitude of defiance, every few seconds each uttering a short cry—*seens, seens*. It was a suggestive picture, these two pugnacious little creatures, one facing the other in a fighting attitude; each daring its opponent to touch the food. They did not seem to take the slightest notice of me, so intent were they on their prize; and it was not until I almost touched them that they flew away. I picked up the meat and put it down again in two pieces, when each bird pounced upon its share and carried it off well satisfied. I have seen Robins fighting furiously in a large snow-covered field for no apparent reason except jealousy of one finding better supplies than the other.

Other frequent visitors to the garden were Titmice. I had some difficulty in obtaining photographs of these, owing to the fighting Robin; but there were



GREAT TIT.

times when he was away. Once a Great Tit boldly attacked him, and drove him from the ground, so that I got a picture of the Tit sitting on the topmost point of the dead branch. In the photograph the Great Tit appears to be quiet and contented; but this does not do it justice, for Tits are always on the move, and some of their attitudes, when feeding, are very interesting. They will hang head downwards, or in any position that is most convenient for them while feeding.

In the woods in winter large parties of Titmice are seen all industriously 'working' the under branches of trees. The Blue Tit is the commonest; and any one living near a wood or orchard can attract these pretty birds by hanging a piece of fat in a tree. If the food is hung by a piece of string so much the better; for then one will be enabled to see the curious actions of Titmice in perfection: as the food sways with their weight we are entertained by all kinds of gymnastic feats. It sometimes happens that dead birds are found in the winter, literally starved to death; if one of these is placed near the Blue Tits it will be seen what little cannibals they are. Without much ceremony they commence to make a hole in the dead bird's skull; and then, when that is done, they eat the brains.

As soon as the food was placed in the garden, hosts of Sparrows, Starlings, and Finches, would become

attracted. I selected meat bones for Starlings,—these kept these noisy birds fully employed, so that other smaller birds had a chance. In great contrast to Robins were the Hedge-Sparrows. These are at all times of a quiet and unobtrusive turn, and although, no doubt, as hungry as their bolder companions, they would wait until all others had finished, and then content themselves by picking up any tiny crumbs left behind.

Starlings are always quarrelsome among themselves, whether in winter snow or summer sunshine. As soon as one succeeded in pulling a piece of meat from a bone others less fortunate would fight for it. Their manner of fighting is extremely curious; for as soon as one is attacked it mounts about a foot above ground, the other does the same, and then both 'spar' at each other in the air. When a flock of Starlings is in a meadow, every now and then two will be seen harmlessly pecking at each other in this way. Starlings—which, by the way, are the best friends of the farmer—suffer more than others in a severe winter. Grubs and worms, which they feed on, are not to be found, and hundreds inevitably perish. I have found them dead at such times, and have even seen one fall while flying, to die of exhaustion brought on by hunger.

Sparrows were the most numerous of my feathered

visitors in the snow-covered garden. There must have been at least a hundred at times; and they very quickly devoured all the supplies which I placed for them. Blackbirds were the shyest; it was very seldom that one would show itself; they kept in the shadow of a hedge, and only ran out to snatch up

BLACKBIRD (HEN).

a piece of food now and then. By waiting many hours I was at last able to expose a plate on a hen; her mate, however, kept in the hedge, and towards evening, when it was becoming almost too dark for photography, he flew out, just settled on the food tied on to the branch on which he was sitting and then quickly returned to the hedge. A cock Black-

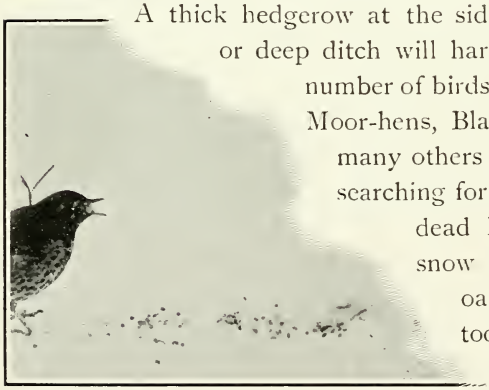
bird, when in the snow, is really a handsome bird; his brilliant sable plumage is shown off to the very best advantage. I tried many dodges to allure one out from the hedge to photograph him in the snow, but was not successful. The most troublesome 'sitters' of all were Thrushes. There were plenty of them, but they behaved somewhat after the manner of the Robins. If one was feeding it would drive others away; but it nearly always happened that the one engaged in feeding would always keep just out of the part focussed. I did manage to expose one plate—to obtain only half the bird, however; but as this is somewhat unique as a photograph it is reproduced

BLACKBIRD (MALE).

here. The food which the hungry bird is swallowing can just be seen disappearing down the wide-opened beak. It is to be regretted that the whole bird does not show, but this was my only chance of getting a picture of a Thrush.

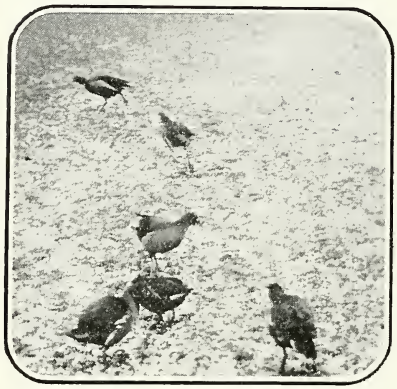
In the evenings, when smaller birds had retired to roost, an Owl visited the garden. It would hover in front of the ivy covering the house, until it heard a movement of one of the sleeping Sparrows. To judge by the number of times this Owl entered the ivy, he must have found this mode of getting food very successful. I tried for a photograph by flashlight, but did not succeed.

It is a matter for wonder to many people whither the birds of the woods and fields go during winter. They are still to be seen by the diligent observer. A thick hedgerow at the side of a wood or deep ditch will harbour a large number of birds; Partridges, Moor-hens, Blackbirds, and many others can be seen searching for food among dead leaves. The snow round about oak trees, if not too deep, will be found to be scratched



SONG THRUSH FEEDING.

away by hungry Rooks and Pigeons in the hope of finding stray acorns. Smaller birds such as Wrens, Goldcrests, and Titmice keep to the thick shelter of fir trees. Finches resort to a stream-side or railway embankment, and live on seeds of such dead plants as show above the snow. Pollarded willows will also be well worked by Tree-Creepers and other insect-feeding birds.



MOOR-HENS FEEDING IN A SNOW-COVERED MEADOW.

Those who wander about the country lanes and woods throughout the year will notice what affection birds have for their homes. By their homes I mean the immediate neighbourhood in which they first had their nest. Hedge-Sparrows in the coldest weather will still be seen where they were in the brighter days of spring. Robins that have bred far from an inhabited dwelling stay near their breeding-haunts all through the coldest weather of winter. Perhaps the greatest affection for their special haunts is seen in our larger birds. Carrion-Crows will remain in

the wood they have chosen for their home although greatly persecuted. It is the young birds of the year

SPARROWS.

that come in such great numbers to the houses in the hard times of winter.

Although in a severe winter a large number of the feathered tribes perish, one seldom sees a dead bird.

For the most part, when death is drawing near, animals will hide themselves in some out-of-the-way spot. Hundreds of little lives could be saved in hard winter weather if people would only feed them more.

MOOR-HEN IN THE SNOW.

A little food goes a long way even with hungry birds. A few meat bones, pieces of fat, bread-crumbs, and other things, which would otherwise be wasted, will, if placed in a garden —no matter how near a city or large town — quickly attract a number of interesting famishing feathered visitors which will give a bird lover genuine entertainment, while he will have the satisfaction, not only of having done an act of true charity, but of having saved lives of birds which will repay a hundredfold when summer warmth and sunshine return.

XII

A Middlesex Copse

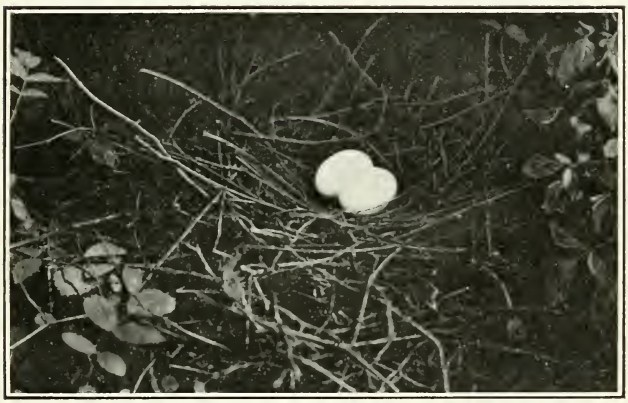
ON the border of that fine stretch of Old England —Enfield Chase—there is a small copse which is both picturesque and attractive. It is bounded on all sides by gently undulating country, well wooded and fruitful, although as land it may not be of the richest. From the ridge above the copse an extensive view is obtained stretching towards Epping Forest, over part of Middlesex, into Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Berkshire ; and in clear weather it is said that the Kent hills can be seen.

This small woodside copse is held sacred by one or two ornithologists owing to the fact that Goldfinches breed there. Summer is well in—July having commenced—when I find myself with my camera roaming amongst its leafy seclusion. Here and there are small open spaces with quantities of dead wood lying on the ground, which is half covered by trailing brambles and decayed leaves. Tall hollyhocks are everywhere dotted about, like spires of red towering

over the lower bushes; and in places there are large groups of these pretty plants, no two being of the same height, but all are covered thickly at the bottom with red cone-shaped flowers, while the tops taper gradually off into buds. The undergrowth in places is so thick, that it is with difficulty seen into, while it is impossible to make way through it. Whitethroats are dodging above these thick parts, and their young are no doubt in hiding in them. Garden-Warblers are singing engagingly from several bushes, and although July is the silent month as regards the wild woodlands, many birds have not yet ceased to give forth their notes. When another fortnight has passed there will hardly be a bird's song to be heard; even the Sky-Lark will then be silent.

Turtle Doves are *purring* from the thickest corner of the copse, and a careful search reveals one of their nests containing two fledgelings; also a Wood-Pigeon's containing two eggs; and a Bullfinch's, all within a very small radius. After much trouble I was able to get a photograph of the Wood-Pigeon's by climbing a tree near and lashing my camera to the trunk. In this way a very good view of the nest could be obtained; but owing to the swaying of the tree only a very short exposure could be given. One needs to be very cautious when photographing Turtle Doves' nests, as the birds will desert their eggs or

young on the slightest provocation. My friend Mr. R. B. Lodge, who was with me on this occasion, has known them to leave their young to die of starvation simply through being frightened from their nest containing the brood. The Turtle Dove is the only bird which will desert its young in this



WOOD-PIGEON'S NEST.

way, so far as my experience goes. I succeeded, after the exercise of much patience, in securing a picture of two fluffy youngsters, without either of the parent birds knowing of my presence. Pigeons, when collecting food for their young, will often be far away from their nest for more than an hour at a time ; and there is a good opportunity to photograph the young during such an interval.

In a small copse one often comes upon several species of birds happily breeding in proximity to each other. Pigeons and Finches in this corner are living peacefully, and there are signs of young from other nests having been reared. In a boathouse in Norfolk I once found a number of Swallows' nests; there was a Wren not far away, and I was anxious to discover whether he had a nest near the Swallows. On searching, one was seen to be actually built inside a Swallow's nest; the mud used by the Swallow formed the foundation, and over this the Wren had placed a dome of moss, and so had formed a very comfortable home with only half her usual labour.

Each succeeding year a pair of Nightjars breed in this small wood. We searched in the open spaces hoping to find the sitting bird; but as she exactly resembles a piece of decaying or dead wood, this was no easy matter, as dead leaves and pieces of wood were everywhere about. At last, when one of us had our foot nearly on the bird, I discovered her sitting flat on the ground in the corner of a small clearing strewn with logs. One needs to see the Nightjar amid her actual surroundings to realise what a wonderful resemblance her feathers have in colour to objects around. The photograph gives an idea of this protective coloration.

To look at the bird one would think she was

perfectly oblivious of everything going on, as her eye is almost closed, as can be clearly seen in the picture; but it only needed a sudden movement to

NIGHTJAR AND YOUNG.

send her away. With patience and care we got several pictures. It will be noticed that a young Nightjar is peeping out from beneath its mother's wing, but this was not noticed until after the

photograph was developed, so that this alone will give an idea of their marked resemblance to the ground about them. When we had exposed enough

YOUNG NIGHTJARS.

plates I approached the bird quietly from behind to see what the result would be. Putting out my hand I tried to touch her; but although apparently asleep she was wide awake, and very quickly flew away.

The young were alarmed, and we had some trouble in taking their picture, as one insisted upon running away; and if we lost sight of either one or the other it would have been impossible to find it again. The old bird settled on a tree behind, and squatted lengthwise on a branch, as is usually, but not always the case; I have seen them sitting for long, across the branch like any other bird. I wanted to obtain a picture on her return, as she hovered over the young; but although I waited some time beneath a bush in a cramped position, she would not return.

The flight of the Nightjar is as nearly as possible the perfection of aerial graceful movement. One needs to be in a place they frequent on a light evening to see them at their best. Some parts of the New Forest are very favourable for such observation. I well remember one such night. I was standing on the side of a hill; below was a large heath on which the birds bred; but it was a little too early for their eggs, and they were in that state of amorous excitement which precedes egg-laying. Near by was a cluster of large birch trees, and it was around these that the birds were playing. Now one would dive from a high branch and glide smoothly and noiselessly a short distance; then, suddenly pulling up, he would execute the most marvellous twists and turns—and all without a sound; then slowly rising he would

again drop to the earth, this time clapping his wings and uttering a series of sharp cries ; then, when nearly touching the ground, he would glide along and rise farther away ; and at last came the most beautiful movement of all : he slowly descended to a branch with wings raised over his back, the tips of each not quite touching. It is perfectly impossible to give any adequate idea of the extreme gracefulness of the Nightjar's flight under these conditions, when all is still and the wood is wrapt in semi-darkness. The only thing that I can liken it to—but the bird's flight is really much more beautiful and striking—is the flight of the Red-Admiral butterfly when sailing over a bed of flowers and seeming undecided which to settle on. When one bird had finished, another would appear and go through similar evolutions ; and sometimes two or three would join in the exercise, with loud clapping of wings.

After long continued observation of these birds, I hold strongly to the opinion that they collect their food with the mouth wide open—that is, where swarms of small insects abound. In this way they would collect large quantities of gnats, etc. The bristles around the beak would be a great help in collecting food in this way. There must be a reason for their having so large a mouth, and bristles at each side ; and I think it would be out of the question for a bird of this size to catch small flies separately. This mode

of feeding might also account for the many wonderful movements in flight while sailing in mid air among swarms of insects. I also think it is proved by Mr. Edmund Selous, that the parent birds feed their young in the same manner as Pigeons,—that is, by regurgitation (see *Zoologist*, No. 701, November 1899). While trying to photograph a Nightjar as she was squatting on a branch, I heard one or two liquid notes—*lit-it-it*, *lit-it*, which were at once recognised as those of the Goldfinch. Looking in the direction, we saw two birds sitting together on a dead oak branch; and after watching them for some time through field-glasses, they flew away, one dropping into the thick bushes below. I went towards the spot and searched the bushes well for their nest without any success, and then turned attention to the trees. There were a number of young oaks about standing some thirty feet high. On the very first one examined I saw a little nest about ten or twelve feet up, built close to the trunk, amongst small thin branches. I struck the tree with a stick, and to my delight a Goldfinch flew from the branches. I ascended the trunk, and there saw one of the most beautiful little nests it has ever been my lot to look upon, made of fine green moss, lined with white willow-down, and containing three eggs. As sometimes happens, when a good nest is found one is not able to photograph it owing to no plates being available. It was so in

this case ; my companion and I had exposed all the plates we had, and were many miles from home, or from where our stock could be replenished. But it is always a risk to put off photographing a nest until another day; many a time have I regretted doing this, owing to the eggs being taken by some unscrupulous collector, or by an egg-stealing bird. However, there was nothing for us to do but to leave this one until next day, when we returned with a supply of plates.

SITE OF GOLDFINCH'S NEST.

It was mentioned that the nest was about ten feet from the ground, on a slender tree, without any

large branches that would offer support for the camera. We tried to borrow a ladder from a farm-house near, but they had not one that was suitable; we could get nothing more than a small pair of steps and some rope, but with these it was impossible to raise the camera high enough for our purpose. At a distance of about one hundred yards was a number of felled trees, and we dragged three of the smaller ones to the spot and endeavoured to make an enormous tripod. It was heavy work, but at last we had the satisfaction of seeing the result of our labours in a very cumbersome-looking stand. By moving each leg of our improvised tripod a few inches at a time we at last got it in position. Then to our dismay it was not quite tall enough, but we found by lashing one of our tripods on top of the large one the camera would be raised high enough to effect our purpose. By means of the steps, which proved of great use after all, we were able to reach the camera for focussing. But a worse difficulty arose: a wind sprang up, and the tree was so slender that only a slight motion of the air would affect it, and with a gusty wind it was a difficult matter to focus a nest which swayed right across the focussing screen. Occasionally the wind dropped a little, and we tried to expose plates, but it was feared they would be failures; the only one of these which was a success was one exposed about the twentieth part

of a second. Luckily towards evening the wind dropped, and we secured several pictures of this rare nest, with what result readers will judge for themselves.

It is but seldom that one finds a nest in a position easy to photograph, and critics of such photographs have complained that many look as if they were 'toppling over,' or the 'backgrounds are out of focus.' If a nest is photographed on a still, bright day, it is possible to stop the lens down until the greatest distance is in focus; but it is not often the bird photographer can enjoy such a time. On a windy day one has to have a large aperture in the lens, so that quick exposures can be given to prevent movement; and again, a camera resting upon a moving branch of a tree is very different from one standing on the firm ground. Under such conditions quick exposures must be given, with the consequence that the near foreground, or distance, has to suffer. I make it a rule to get every part of the plate sharply focussed if possible, and when this is not so there is a very good reason. In regard to many nests looking as if they were 'toppling over,' let those who complain try to take a photograph under similar difficult conditions to those described in connection with the Goldfinch.

It is to be greatly regretted that such a beautiful bird as the Goldfinch is so rare in the greater part

GOLDFINCH'S NEST.

of these Islands. Happily it is now slowly but surely increasing in those districts where the Wild Birds Protection Act is properly enforced. Last autumn I spent a few days in a remote Dorsetshire village, and was delighted to see so many of these handsome Finches. Notices setting forth the Act were posted in prominent parts of the village; and to judge by the conversation I overheard between two native women villagers, the paper was not put up for decorative purposes, as seems to be the case in some of our London suburbs.

'Have you 'eared abowt old Polly Crane? She's a been 'ad up fer ketchin' Goldfinches in 'er gardin.'

'You doan't say so!'

'Yes, and she's been fined five shillin'.'

At this stage the second lady waxed warm in language more energetic than polite on the oppressiveness of the 'Law'; and she kept on adding in her expressive Western *patois* that a bird was a flyin' thing, a flyin' abart, and that any one 'ad a right to ketch of 'um, and the law was a 'rong 'un; and if Goldies came into her gardin she considered they 'ad come to be ketched, and she 'ad a right to ketch of 'um, and what was more would do so: blow the policeman, the law, or any one else who interfered! 'What say you, master?' I tried to impress upon her that the law was right; but she could not see eye to eye with me, and at last gave up the argument,

muttering that a bird was a flyin' thing to be ketched.

Not more than four miles from our Middlesex copse there is a village, the surrounding fields of which have several notice boards on which are posted the Wild Birds Protection Act. Almost underneath these boards, and in the height of the nesting season, I have seen bird-catchers at work at their cruel trade. No notice of these people seems to be taken by the local authorities; and the bird-catching and systematic robbery of every nest found goes on, and will still continue until something is done. If this is not done quickly it will be too late, as far as some of our best and rarest local breeding birds are concerned.

It is not surprising that such an attractive cage-bird as the Goldfinch should be rare in places where bird-catching goes on unchecked. To a bird lover it is most enjoyable to see Goldfinches at close quarters, as I have done. What a pert little creature he looks, as he sits on a thistle head! Just as he settles, the thistle sways slightly, and then he has a little difficulty in getting a sure foothold. It is now that we see him in his most engaging form; the handsomely marked wings are fluttering; his tail is spread out, and with bent head he angrily 'talks'—*pu-i, pu-i.* At length he settles and commences to pull the feathery seeds out of the thistle, not one

at a time, as might be supposed, but in whole bunches. He now flies to a firmer support, places the seeds on his perch, and puts one foot on them, and then separates the seeds from their downy surroundings.

'*Pink, pink.*'

The notes come from a cock Chaffinch which has flown to the gound near. It is now that we can admire the Goldfinch. Raising his wings defiantly and sitting facing the Chaffinch, and bending forward, he angrily calls *pe-u-i, pe-u-i.* *Pink, pink,* answers the larger bird ; but without more ado, the Goldfinch viciously dashes towards the inoffensive Chaffinch and drives him away. Returning to the thistle head, and calling *pe-u-i* several times in defiance to other intruders, he more quietly resumes an interrupted meal, again pulling out a bunch of silvery seeds, and using his feet to hold the food with in the same way as a Hawk might do. His whole manner is kingly and delightful to watch ; he seems perfectly conscious that he is of importance, and gives other larger birds to understand that he is not to be trifled with. What a pity it is that such Finches are not more numerous ! They are charming little inhabitants of bird-land, and deserve to be protected ; and they would be if the Wild Birds Protection Act were practised as much as it is preached.

The Goldfinch's nest is as beautiful as the bird

that constructs it. Fine mosses are used for the outside, while the interior is beautifully lined with much finer materials, and soft willow-down, the whole being a small compact round nest that would win anybody's admiration. It is sometimes placed as high as twenty-five feet from the ground; at other times low down, but always well concealed. Their song is very pleasing; though not loud, it is sweet, and as good, if not better, than those of other Finches. I have heard a Goldfinch and Linnet singing close together,—each, as it were, trying to out-sing a rival; the pert Goldfinch being a contrast to the Linnet. The latter sat quietly on a branch and uttered his notes in a complacent kind of way. Not so the other: he could not keep still, and the song was hurried through and then started again in a louder pitch, as if he thought it was great impudence on the Linnet's part to dare to sing near to him.

This Middlesex copse has been the Goldfinches' home for many years, and let us hope that they will breed on undisturbed for many generations to come.

'I love to see the little Goldfinch pluck
The groundsel's feathered seed;
And then, in bower of apple blossoms perch'd,
Trim his gay suit and pay us with a song.
I would not hold him prisoner for the world.'

HURDIS.

XIII

Round and About a Surrey Common

SURREY is one of the most favoured counties in England in regard to commons. On old maps we see that at one time the whole western part was a series of wild tracts of uncultivated land. It was possible to travel from Ascot Heath in Berkshire, thence across Surrey to Bexley Heath in Sussex, over common-land the whole distance—a stretch of thirty miles. Since those days much of the land has been enclosed, but there are still thousands of acres

> 'So wondrous wild, the whole might seem
> The scenery of a fairy dream.'

Are Londoners generally aware of the wild beauty and attractiveness of these commons? One might think that they were not; for one may ramble for hours without meeting a single human being. Within a few miles of the greatest city on earth we can wander at random over broad tracts where the

purple heather blooms and the wild strawberry bears its fruit.

Lovely indeed is the outlook of any one of these delightful remnants of mediæval England on a fine spring morning. Standing on a ridge, I look across a stretch of wild heath-land that is not surpassed by the best scenery of the New Forest. What a wide undulating expanse of country this is! Heather and bracken everywhere, with solitary trees of greenest tints, and patches of pines in company, the air being sweetly perfumed with the odours of wild thyme and other herbs, while Yellow-Hammers at intervals provide music which is carried on the breeze. A long deep valley stretches for miles below; meadows and coppices, small heaths and arable land on the sunny slopes remind one of some wonderful chequered carpet set out with many harmonising shades. In a distant wood is a cottage; one cannot actually discern its arrangements, but sunbeams reflected in the glass become balls of light like little suns. Beyond the valley, in the distance, stands Caterham Church, peeping out from the thick foliage round about, and nearer still that of Upper Warlingham. Clouds cast shadows which travel over field and wood, imparting darker shades to dale and dell as they float across. Wood-Pigeons fly out of a copse below on the valley side; and although I look down on them

they are still high above the earth. A Lark singing the song which has reminded many a traveller in distant lands of 'Home, Sweet Home,' poises in its downward flight. Labourers are at work in the fields: but it is not easy to distinguish them without a field-glass; and there, too, a plough moves slowly with its team of horses. Patches of chalk gleam in the sun, and are dazzling to the eye.

A variety of flowers is seen. The fields round about are sprinkled with the small purple heads of salad burnet; in among the grass, and growing with wild thyme, are the peculiar but beautiful tiny flowers of milkwort. Seed pods of bush vetch are nearly ripe, and in a few days will be bursting, the effect then being a continual cracking noise. Hop and bird's-foot trefoil trail amongst the grasses on the hillsides. Near a flowering root of bladder-campion, a Tree-Pipit rises and discloses its well-hidden nest; the bird watching from a small wild rose bush as we examine the eggs. Alongside the hedges is woody nightshade, also dog-wood, and in places field-scabious. Ox-eye daisies and quaking or dodder-grass wave in the soft summer wind, keeping time with taller grasses. The Pipit rises a short distance, descends with outspread wings, calling *see-ar—see-ar—see-ar*, and then returns to the bush.

Across this field, and beyond the heather, is a steep roadside copse. At regular intervals the loud

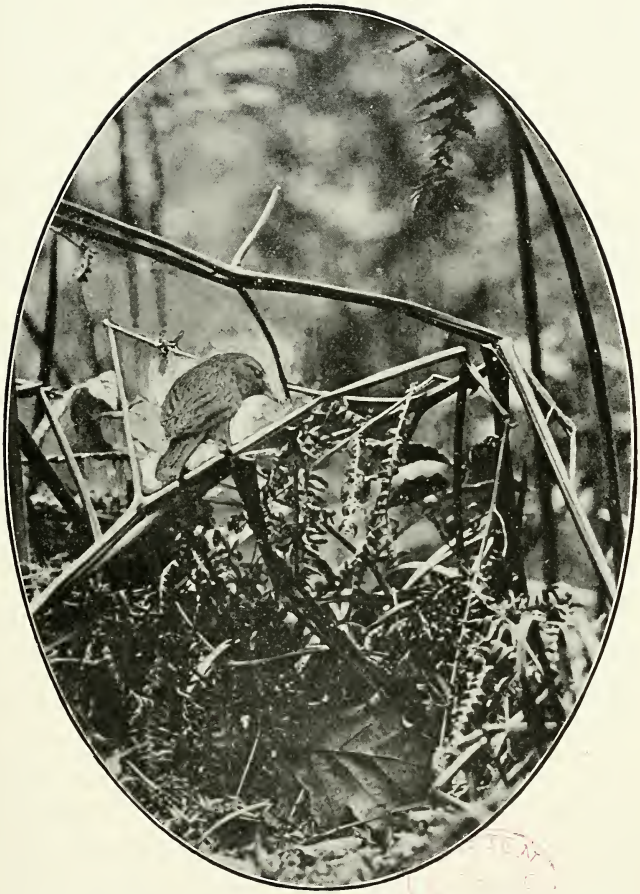
song of the Wood-Warbler is here heard. I enter this leafy enclosure and watch the bird, hoping he may indicate the site of his nest; but instead of doing this he leads the way farther from it. One might search for days in this leaf-covered ground for his nest; and hence it is better to lie hidden by bracken and to wait. The Wood-Wren still sings, and by degrees comes nearer, until he is in a bush close at hand. Lower and lower he comes, and I hope he will go to the nest, when suddenly a little bird flies from the ground close to my face, and thus discloses her most skilfully hidden six eggs.

The Wood-Warbler is a woodland bird I have long wished to study more carefully, so that I moved farther away and watched this pair. While the male sang, the hen called *pu-i*, *pu-i*, and then slowly moved nearer towards the nest, until she settled on some bracken directly over the site. Whistling once again, she quietly dropped into the nest, and was then silent, while her mate still sang loudly. As it was late, I could not photograph it, but returned on the following morning and hid my camera under a heap of dead bracken. The nest was under a dome of leaves; when the hen was sitting she was seen with difficulty, and in a picture she would have been invisible. I hoped, however, that before entering, she would settle on one of the fern stalks growing near. After a careful examination of the strange pile near her home she

flew direct to it and sat on her eggs. I wondered how I should get a picture, as she did this every time. At last I roused her from the nest, and placed a leaf over the entrance; this just covered the space.

After a while the Wood-Wren again returned, and seemed to be very much surprised at the leaf fitted in front of her home. For a moment she looked at this, then without more ado she managed to pull it away. I secured a photograph of this interesting scene; but the Warbler so closely resembles the leaves around that it is almost impossible to distinguish her, and the picture is not here reproduced for that reason.

Once again I fastened a leaf over the nest entrance, and this time more securely. When the hen approached, several efforts were made to remove the obstruction, but without success. *Pu-i*, *pu-i*, she called, and her gallant mate came to her assistance. Then they did what I had waited for during three hours; both settled on a piece of bracken near the nest, and, as it were, held a consultation. I pinched the pneumatic ball, and a strange thing happened. There was a loud report, like a pistol-shot, and both birds, of course, flew away. I had in use more tubing than was necessary, and found that part of this was under my body; my weight prevented the air from passing through the tube, which consequently



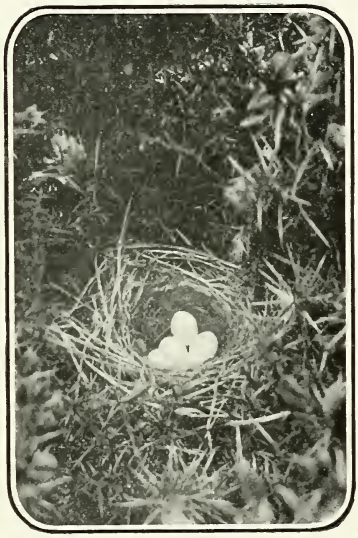
WOOD-WREN

burst with some noise, which startled me quite as much as the birds. I quickly mended the tube, and was only just in time to secure the illustration now shown. In all I waited four hours hoping to secure a snapshot of both birds together; but the pistol-like report so scared the cock that he did not again venture near the nest. If the hen remained off the eggs any length of time her mate attacked her, and seemingly scolded her for negligence. My friend Mr. Stanley Boys, who for some years past has studied bird life among these Surrey hills, had noticed a similar thing to happen in the case of other birds when a hen was too long away from her eggs.

The Wood-Wren's song is very attractive, and cannot be confounded with that of any other bird. Owing to their very local habits they are often overlooked in some districts; and they never wander far from their nests. The loud clear whistle, repeated about twenty times, and such notes as *tr-r-r-r-r-r-r-eez*, can be heard from a distance on a still day.

Leaving the trees, in which Ring Doves are leisurely *cooing*, we will return to the common. Over a group of furze bushes Linnets are twittering, and many of their nests are there. It is difficult to photograph any one of these; for the wind, although slight, is strong enough to move the branches. A bird flies from the base of one of the bushes, and is at once

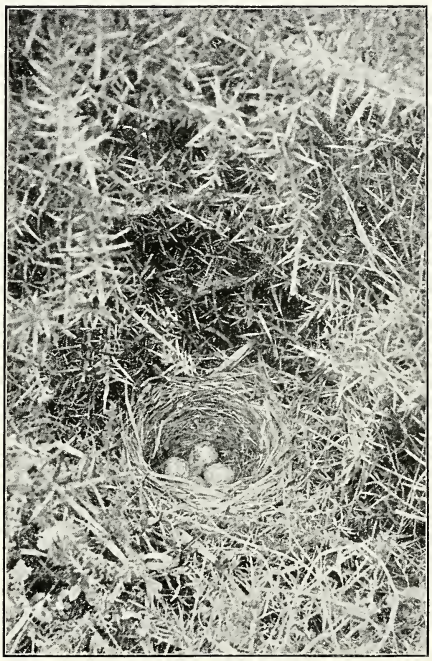
recognised as a Cirl-Bunting. Although these birds breed on this common, the nest was not discovered. They breed sparingly on some of the large moors of the New Forest, from one of which my photograph was obtained. The eggs, as a rule, can be distinguished from the Yellow-Hammers' by their bolder markings and less hair-like lines. Without seeing the sitting bird, however, it is rather hazardous to decide. Cirl Buntings are more sociable than Yellow-Hammers, and will soon return to the vicinity of their nest if one remains quite still. Their song resembles the Yellow-Bunting's, but lacks the characteristic *no cheese* at the end. It may be likened to *zee-zee-zee-zee-zee*, and is well described by the French name of the bird—*Zizi*. The Cirl-Bunting seems to favour chalky commons in preference to other parts.



LINNET'S NEST.

Near by is a steep ridge, resembling the side of

a cliff. Forty yards below are several oaks, and one can overlook their top branches. There are also many lesser trees and bushes, whence comes the *purring* of Turtle Doves. The valley winds westward, and then takes a turn. All along its steep sides are coppices of beech, in which hundreds of Ring Doves breed. Descending the hill-side, we enter one of these glades, but the steep sides occasion some difficulty in walking. Bullfinches, Greenfinches, and Garden-Warblers fly out from bushes as we scramble along, all of which have nests, and many of them are found. Above, a Turtle Dove is heard, and in a thick hawthorn its



CIRL-BUNTING'S NEST.

nest may be seen. The Dove flies with loud flapping as it leaves the bush; the nest contains only one

TURTLE DOVE'S NEST.

egg, but notwithstanding makes a pretty picture. In the still hours of evening, Turtle Doves will meet on certain open spaces in woods and go through

many manœuvres. First one bird rises about sixty feet above the trees, then descends slowly, with wings raised over its back; others then take up the exercise, while those perched in trees cry *tr-rr-rr-rr-rr*, *tr-rr-rr-rr-rr*. It is a pretty performance, especially when they descend to the ground. The action altogether is like the Tree-Pipit's flight while singing.

This roadside copse is full of delightful bird music. Most of the common Warblers are singing; the Nightingale gives short bursts of his liquid song. Everywhere Greenfinches are twittering their love-talk; and in one bush the young have left their nest and are joining in the chorus. A Jay darts in among the trees and settles just overhead, but seeing an intruder utters a startled scream and hurriedly leaves, but not before the wary bird has unconsciously shown the site of his well-hidden nest, containing one egg. It is not often one sees a Jay in the breeding season; and I have known them to elude the watchfulness of the most keen-sighted gamekeepers, and bring up a nestful of young. Numbers of these fine birds breed in Epping Forest; but although I have counted dozens of their old nests during a day's ramble, when the trees have been bare, I have seldom found them in the breeding season. On the Surrey hills they also breed in fair numbers; there are so many wild, unfrequented woods, that one would expect to meet with them more often than is the case.

At the end of this small wood much healthful heathland still stretches on before. A sprightly little bird calls *chak chak* from the yellow gorse as he hops from bush to bush. His jet black head and white collar show him to be a Stonechat. He is essentially a bird of the heathland, and is associated in my mind with the lonely yellow gorse-covered moors of the New Forest. Like the two birds first mentioned in this chapter, the Stonechat is local and keeps to the same breeding-ground each year. One of the places in Middlesex where this species breeds, is in a small churchyard situated in one of the most densely populated districts

JAY'S NEST.

within the twelve-mile radius of London. These are no doubt descendants of those birds which nested here when the picturesque ivy-covered church stood alone, amidst sylvan surroundings of far-stretching fields, and wild marshes in which the Bittern was wont to *boom*. What a contrast is now seen! But still, the Stonechat, with that strange love for its ancestral ground which is found alike in birds and human beings, rears its young amid the white tombstones.

But to return to our Surrey common. As we get nearer to the golden furze, the excited Stonechat calls vehemently and tries to attract us from its home. It would be almost impossible to find the nest by searching, but luckily the hen, startled by footsteps, rises from a grass clump, and there is the site. How annoyed the cock appears to be; how he scolds and hops from bush to bush, while his quieter mate meanwhile anxiously remains on a grass stem to watch while we photograph the eggs. Directly we turn aside she returns to the nest, but the angry cock leads us, or, rather, fancies he leads us, from that part of the common until the gorse is far behind.

A Surrey common in June should fascinate and instruct anyone, however ignorant of Nature's wonders. To bird lovers it is a veritable paradise. Especially is it so at eventide, when the red orb of the sun sinks beyond the slopes and hillocks of heather, accompanied, as it were, behind the far distant blue

STONECHAT'S NEST.

hills by drifting crimson clouds. Sunset is the signal for the Fern-Owl to be out and about, and hence from different directions is heard their 'jarring' or 'churring.' The complement of the summer day is now enjoyed in the softer silence of approaching night. A gentle musical sound pervades the flower-scented air, caused by the faintly perceptible murmur of the breeze and the hum of countless insects. Nature is still telling her secrets in the quieter evening atmosphere. I yearn for deeper insight into her mysteries, and for more knowledge of her everyday marvels. I do not refer to the knowledge found in books, nor to that to be discovered by hard study. I long to know what a bird's song means. Listen to the notes of the Nightingale in yonder copse, which seem to speak of other things than those of earth, but which we know no more about than we do of that other great mystery of bird life—Migration. To be alone with Nature at such a time gives one a yearning for the unknown which cannot fully be satisfied. Everything around is so full of mystery, and of things not to be fathomed.

The loud hoot of a Tawny Owl arouses one from any reverie, however; and the stars are now seen to be shining clear and bright. After a day of rare enjoyment, reluctantly I turn homeward—to leave the charms of this Surrey Common to *churring* Night-jars and the lonely Nightingale.

XIV

A Middlesex Brook

THE bushes alongside the slowly flowing stream are already of a faint green tinge, and the banks are also losing their washed winter appearance; where here and there a primrose brightens the otherwise still sombre outlook. Autumn left behind a rough tangle of decaying vegetation, which the winter storms soon swept away; for when snow falls heavily and then melts, the stream presently becomes a torrent. During a recent flood the Moor-hens resorted to adjoining flooded meadows, and Water-Voles left their brookside haunts to come inland, hiding by day in ditches, or under hedges, and feeding by night. Now that the water has got back to its normal height, these have returned, and Moor-hens are already choosing their nesting-places; some have even commenced to build.

The holes in which Water-Voles had lived are filled up by mud and other débris, and their 'runs'

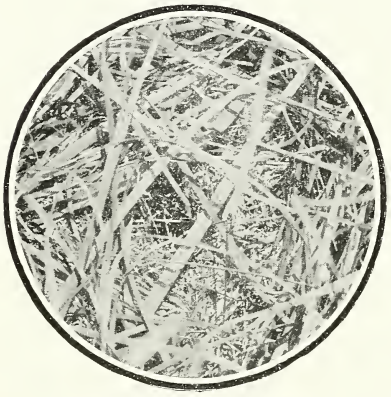
are quite obliterated. Not to be daunted, however, they are busily at work constructing new homes; but as these are made at night, it is impossible to see them at their interesting labours. It is so seldom that one is able to study the ways of our British wild animals, owing to their nocturnal habits, that it is really a pleasure to find oneself in the company of such an engaging little quadruped as the Water-Vole. He is always attractive, and is especially so when feeding. Peasants,

WATER-VOLE.

and others as ignorant, call him a 'rat,' and quite naturally confound him with the common rodents which infest barns and outhouses. They are as common on any stream-side as ordinary rats, but few people can distinguish one from the other. The Common Rat is grey, and when moving along his 'runs' he has a clumsy appearance. Not so with the Vole: he is elegant and graceful in all his movements, while his colour is a rich dark brown, and he has not a pointed nose like his grey compeer. His front teeth are long and curved, and are of a deep yellow colour; his ears are hardly visible, which alone should distinguish him from the Common Rat. In manners he more resembles a beaver than a rat; when the young are able to swim, the skilful parents make a platform of sticks or reed blades for the youngsters to rest upon. These are built on any support that may offer itself in the stream, such as a submerged branch, or any convenient object. If the water rises slightly, other materials are added, so that the nest, as it might be called, is still kept fairly dry. These platforms are also used as feeding stations.

The Water-Vole is one of the cleanest of small animals, and when not feeding is often seen engaged in attending to its glossy brown fur. As far as I have been able to observe, their whole diet is a vegetable one. Many times have I been gratified

by seeing one sitting at the waterside engaged in preparing a repast. First they collect the food, which is often a tiny green plant which grows on the surface of the water; this is gathered with one of the front feet, which are used as hands. On finding a suitable support they sit on their haunches, and carry the food to their mouth by one or both of the front feet, and in this prettily interesting way they eat. Sometimes a selected plant is one growing on the bank and out of reach of their mouth; but if able to touch it with their feet, this is pulled down so that pieces can be nibbled off.



WATER-VOLE'S NEST IN REEDS.

At this time of the year (March) males are sometimes seen fighting. Once, when walking by the brookside, I heard great splashing a little distance down stream. Very cautiously approaching, and being almost hidden by bushes, I was able to observe what was going on without being seen. One Vole was chasing another in the water, the one

attacking the other whenever an opportunity occurred, and *vice-versa*. Now both would disappear, only to be seen again a moment or two after in a different part. Tumbling, and turning over and over, they were again lost to sight in the muddy stream. The water is actually beaten into a foam as these two determined little creatures swim round and round, over and under, performing evolutions which would do credit to an otter. At length the vanquished one makes a deep dive, and in the dense sand-filled water manages to elude his pursuer, now rising at a few yards distance, and then makes away to the best of his ability. The victor now swims to the bank, and when there shakes himself, so as to rid himself of all superfluous water; but notwithstanding all, he deservedly presents a sorry half-drowned appearance. With his front feet he now 'frisks' the water from his face, then slowly runs off and enters his hole, wiser, as one may hope, if not better for his adventure.

In the spacious reed-beds of Norfolk, and in other similar spots, where there are few places for Water-Voles to make holes for living in, nests are made; and nearly every large clump contains one of these. They are domed over, and have a hole at the side for entrance and exit. I have found Bearded Tits and Water-Voles living together in several clumps of reeds as quite friendly neighbours; this clearly

showing that the Vole is no enemy of birds, like the Common Rat.

The chief attraction of the stream at this time, however, is the Kingfisher. In the breeding time these birds are shy, and one does not see much of them ; but later in the year, or about July, it is possible to observe them more closely, providing one is thoroughly hidden. Two adult Kingfishers, flying down stream, followed by four hungry youngsters is a bird-land scene that few would readily forget. I have seen such a company, and have followed the flock to have the pleasure of getting close to the whole charming family as they sat on some over-hanging branch by the water side. When rambling in bird-land one sees many such delightful scenes, pretty little episodes in our birds' every-day lives.

Last winter (January 1900), the earth was washed away from the roots of a tree standing by the water ; it consequently fell across the stream. An attempt was made to remove it, but this failing, the branches were cut away, leaving one stump coming out of the water. This remained in position for the greater part of the year.

I was wandering leisurely along the brook-side one day in June, and thought I caught sight of a King-fisher leaving this stump. I was not certain, however ; but on the next day I returned with my camera, and focussed the stump, hiding all apparatus on the

KINGFISHER AT HOME—PREPARING FOR A NAP.

bank. Some trees were near at hand, and I found that by climbing to the top of one of these a good view of the stump could be obtained, while I remained well concealed. In this position I waited for two hours. Suddenly I saw a flash of brilliant green below; my bird was sitting on the stump. I instantly pressed the pneumatic ball, releasing the shutter—only just in time, for the Kingfisher at once flew away. I descended and hurried home with what I thought would be a good photograph; but on developing I had the mortification of finding that the plate was hopelessly fogged, and of course useless. All bird photographers must necessarily have disappointments at times; but this was one of the worst I ever experienced.

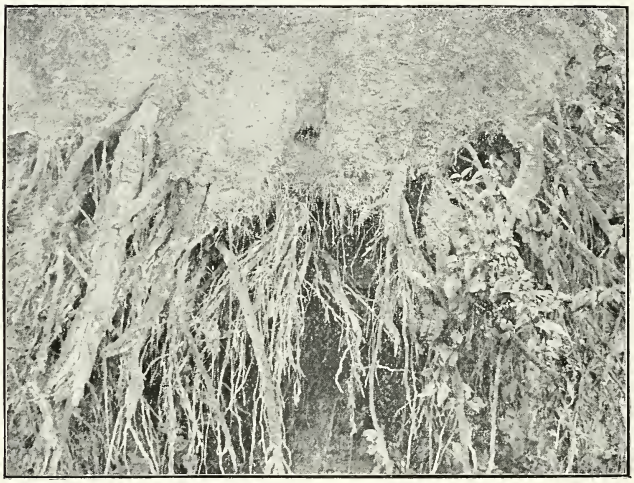
The following day I again returned and put my camera in the same spot, and waited for the Kingfisher. At first it seemed to promise to be a tedious time, and I was none too comfortable in my lofty retreat; but a number of birds visited the tree, and taking note of these and their ways helped to while away the hours. Willow-Wrens and Garden-Warblers perched near, and flew about among the branches in search of food. At first they always seemed surprised when they saw me, but as I kept perfectly still they gained confidence, and at times would almost settle on me.

A Moor-hen which had built her roosting nest

on the submerged tree-trunk became an object of interest as she led her young about. Numbers of birds came to drink at this favourite spot; at one time a Nightingale, a Thrush, and a Blackbird were all close together drinking; these were all within the radius covered by my lens, and would have made a charming picture, but I dared not expose my plate, because the Kingfisher might appear at any minute.

About twelve o'clock I saw him flying up stream, and he settled on the stump. I waited a few minutes, hoping he might take up a better position, but as he showed signs of dozing I exposed a plate. I wanted to get to the camera to change the plate, but did not want my presence in the tree to be known to the bird. I waited for a quarter of an hour, hoping he might fly on, but he closed his eyes and seemed to be going to sleep. At last I tried to frighten him away by throwing things into the water, but these only caused him to gaze intently at the surface thus disturbed. Having taken luncheon, I rolled up the paper in which it had been wrapped, and then threw that at him, thinking surely this would be effective; but he simply looked interested as this fell, and watched it to the bank, and then turned his head to see what was coming next. Three more missiles followed, which only had the effect of making him look up again. I had a book with me, and letting this fall flat as near as possible to

him, it made noise enough to frighten almost any bird; but even this had no disturbing effect on my little visitor, he not deigning even to look aside or to seem to be startled. Eventually, after a volley of more missiles, I descended, and not until I had almost reached the ground did he fly away.



SITE OF KINGFISHER'S NEST.

I changed the plate, reascended the tree, and at the end of another two hours the Kingfisher came back. I particularly wanted to get a picture of him sitting with his back to the camera, so as to more effectively show his beautiful plumage; but, although I waited some minutes, he persisted in facing the lens. By

this time he showed signs of restlessness, by repeatedly looking behind; and as he seemed to be about to leave, I exposed another plate.

The cause of his uneasiness was soon apparent: his quick ears had told of some one's approach, and he flew off, looking like a dart of brightest blue leaving the perch. A rustic trespassing in search of nests then appeared. I shouted to warn him of the pneumatic tube, but he was evidently stone deaf; for he stumbled and got my apparatus about his feet. He then spied the rubbish covering the camera, and, upsetting this, he pulled the camera round. All this time I had been climbing down the tree, and called to him to take care what he did, but found that I could not make him hear. However, the camera and tube were none the worse for this rough usage. I saw no more of the Kingfisher on that day, the commotion having driven him to more distant feeding grounds

The next day I returned to my retreat in the tree, and waited for four and a half hours. The bird passed along the stream twice without settling, and I left without a picture. Other bird visitors helped to provide entertainment. Redstarts came and fed their young; Nightingales did the same. A Sedge-Warbler cheered me with his chatty song; and several species of Titmice hopped round about in the tree. A Wood-Pigeon sat on the topmost branch of a tree hard by and cooed. Water-Voles swam about below,

so that I was kept well entertained while watching all of these birds and animals. People sometimes remark what a weary occupation it must be waiting to photograph a bird,—but really the time passes very quickly ; there are always so many things to attract and engage one's attention, especially in spring or summer. During winter months it is more dull, and, if cold, somewhat more monotonous.

I was determined to get a picture of the Kingfisher showing his back, if possible. Eventually I succeeded; but altogether it cost me twenty-five hours of waiting. Most of this time I sat aloft in the tree ; the other part of the time was passed in a much less comfortable place on the stream bank, underneath a small willow tree. While there I got a very passable photograph ; but divers misadventures seemed to be against me, for on opening the slide the plate was broken in three pieces, one of the cracks being right across the bird's back.

On July 3 I spent seven hours in the tree-top, and was rewarded for my patience by two Kingfishers making their appearance and settling on the stump.

I secured two pictures, and then watched their doings. Just as I had exposed one plate, the second bird arrived and sat close to its companion. It was interesting to take notice of the way in which these bird-fishers caught supplies for a meal. Many naturalists have described them as sitting perfectly

KINGFISHER, SHOWING THE BEAUTIFUL PLUMAGE ON HEAD AND BACK.

still over the water watching for their prey. I found, however, this not to be the case; the only time they were still was when they dozed after a full repast. Otherwise they were continually on the move, and appeared to be even restless. The water was swarming with hundreds of tadpoles, but these were strictly ignored; they caught fish alone. Not once during many hours did they touch one of these, which I thought to be rather strange, seeing that the Kingfisher will sometimes take food other than fish; but perhaps this is only when hunger becomes more pressing.

It was seldom that they took fish immediately underneath where they were sitting. Their eyesight must be something wonderful; for, though the water was far from clear, they made flights of five yards from their perch to drop into the water, and on each one of these short excursions never failed to bring up a fish. One of the birds dived from its perch, and, strange to say, missed its prey; it was in the water only a few seconds, the dive greatly disturbing the surface. On rising it sat on a twig and gazed intently at the water, looking a picture of eagerness; then a second dive was made, and the diver came up with his fish, evidently the one which had been missed the time before. This incident seemed to indicate that the Kingfisher may probably have some kind of attractive or fascinating influence over its prey. One

would have thought that the first dive would have driven all the fish away; for a stone dropped into the water will scatter a swarm of small fish in all directions, notwithstanding that this makes far less splashing than the Kingfisher's dive.

On several occasions the birds hovered some inches over the surface before catching anything; these attempts never failed; and one bird actually settled in a shallow place, and picked up a fish out of the water. Another left the stump, flew about five yards up stream, and settled on a twig a few inches above the water, at a very dark spot. The bird seemed to overbalance backwards, and fluttered, hanging back towards the water; then it turned completely round and dived in one action, and brought up a fish.

When a small fish was caught it would be swallowed at once, and sometimes before the bird again settled. With larger specimens their method was quite different: these were violently beaten on a branch, or on whatever the bird might be sitting, the blows being distinctly heard by me, twenty feet above the performance. It was really surprising to note the quantity which these birds really ate. Their hunger for their favourite food seemed never satisfied, and all the time I watched them they were capturing fish at short intervals, with the exception of about fifteen minutes, when they sat side by side on a branch and dozed, a very necessary sequel to

their heavy meal. This was really a delightful entertainment, and I was extremely sorry when the Kingfishers left. The day was a very stormy one, two heavy thunderstorms passing over,—the accompanying picture being taken just as a third storm-cloud obscured the sun. I previously mentioned that a Moor-hen's nest was built on the trunk ; it is on a part of this that the bird is seen in the photograph.

Before finishing this chapter I will make some remarks on the habits of Moor-hens. In my book, *In Bird-Land, with Field-glass and Camera*, I referred to the previously overlooked habit of Moor-hens making additional nests for their young to roost in. Last spring (1900) I was able to watch several pairs of this species, and found that in all cases an additional nest was added as soon as the young were hatched. When these grew, more nests were made, I believe by the young ones themselves. The nest on the fallen tree, on which the Kingfishers sat, was one of these roosting-nests, and was used every day by young Moor-hens, and also by the parent birds to rest in. Materials such as green grass, hay, and straw were added each night, and the nest consequently reached a great size. I saw freshly gathered green grass in it as late as the beginning of August, the young being hatched on May 7, so that one can judge the size of the nest when it was abandoned in September.

During July the water sank considerably, and the nest became smaller. The birds, evidently having some difficulty in reaching it on account of the height above the water, were pulling pieces from it and

MOOR-HEN'S ROOSTING-NEST.

rebuilding lower down ; but on the water rising again the new one was not finished, and the young continued using the original one, which was repaired. One other roosting-nest was built near, this being a

large loose structure, and was only used for a short time. Each pair of Moor-hens on the brook made these roosting-nests for their young last spring, thus bearing out my belief that these are made for a purpose, and are not a 'useless waste of time and labour,' as I have somewhere seen suggested.

Another habit of Moor-hens is worth noting. It seems to be their general habit, on this Middlesex brook, to commence sitting as soon as the first egg is laid, the result being that some young are hatched before others. The male Moor-hen takes charge of these, and in some cases begins to construct roosting-nests before all the brood are hatched.

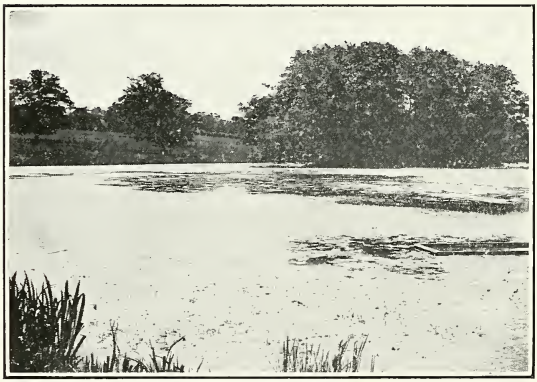
Seven eggs are about the average number laid ; but it is surprising how few young reach maturity. I have never seen more than three nearly full-grown young with their parents, one, or two being more often the total. This is the more remarkable because there are only few enemies to destroy them on this Middlesex stream. There are a few rats, and these probably account for many of those that disappear. The rats and voles, however, are kept down by Herons. Occasionally one of these great birds is seen standing in shallow water waiting for prey. It was only recently I suddenly came upon one so occupied.

A short distance from the brook, and connected with it by a tiny trickling streamlet, is a lake.

This is always an interesting place, and Herons are often to be seen on its reed-fringed margins. It is made more delightful because that sprightly water-bird, the Dabchick, breeds there. In springtime the whole surface of the lake—about two acres—is covered with a growth of water plants and a kind of green slime. This affords an ideal nesting-place for such birds. Many hours have I spent there searching for their eggs, but always unsuccessfully. This is partly owing to their habit of covering their eggs with the slimy surroundings, and to the difficulty of quanting a punt among the weeds. We did manage to move the punt to a part where the nest might be situated. The former, however, had seen better days, and was of very little use ; for when we reached the place it sank, leaving us to reach shore as best we could. On another

SEARCHING FOR LITTLE GREBE'S NEST.

day I tried to discover a nest by wading, without result. In places where the water is free from weeds these lively birds may be seen sporting on the surface, darting here, then diving and coming up a distance away, and again loudly paddling and splashing, but never giving a hint to an eager naturalist as to where their nest may be found.



HAUNT OF THE LITTLE GREBE.

XV

A Summer Night in the Woods

SUCH crimson clouds as showed the course of the setting sun have long since faded into grey. Birds have ceased their songs and sought their roosting places in the thick foliage of the trees. Turtle Doves have ceased *purring* in the bushes; the last homeward-bound Rook has settled by the side of his nest. Bats, which were dodging about near the tree-tops, cannot now be seen; but their shrill notes can be heard.

Heavy clouds gather overhead; no rustling wind breaks the silence among the trees; and in such a close, damp atmosphere, the very air seems to remind one that the oppressive heat of day survives the departed sun. The night is as dark as it is damp and close; but happily under these conditions we are likely to hear the Nightingale sing in perfection. I make my way towards the wood, through long grass and under trees that seem to stand in motionless expectancy. As one passes through the thick

undergrowth, many suggestive rustlings are heard. Now it is a rabbit, then a rat may cross the path. Now and again a shrill squeaking in the grass notifies that a frightened shrew is rushing to its hole.

To reach the wood I have to pass across a valley which is watered by a little stream, and along the bank of this I wend my way. Here occur a variety of noises, such as one hears only when darkness covers the land. Strange sounds indeed are some of these ; others are recognised as the note of some night bird, or the cry of an animal. Then there are noises above ; high up over the trees are heard curious bird notes, such as I cannot quite account for. Perhaps these sounds come from a bird on its passage across the country ; however this may be, it flies quickly, for now it is heard far away, and at last dies away in the distance. Young Moor-hens call from the stream, and much splashing is heard ; intermingled with this are the cries of several older Moor-hens. I can guess what is the cause of this : a bird from another part of the stream has trespassed on a stretch belonging to regular occupiers. A fight ensues, hens helping their gallant mates, and thus the aggressors are driven off. Rats are heard squealing, and as I move along the bank a 'plop' is heard as one and another of these unseen forms dive into the dark water, for a moment to break the strange silence.

Many moths are out and about; a white flittering form dances before one for a second, and is lost in the darkness. Most moths seem to prefer a damp, warm night, to the clearer atmosphere of a cooler evening.

Away in the far distance is an ominous rumbling; thunder can be heard, and gradually storm-clouds come rolling up and add to the gloom. At length every now and then the firmament is lit with a fitful glare, as lightning which is still many miles away flashes on one side of the horizon to illumine the whole heavens. It is now that grand shapes are to be seen—huge masses of cloud, one behind another, which roll onwards, and with each electric flash seem to change their position. One moment we see them in a curious shape, perhaps resembling some material form, and with the next flash this is changed—covered by another great roll of vapour, and thus slowly the vast storm clouds roll onwards.

A large drop of rain strikes a leaf, others follow, and then the stillness seems to be broken; but still the rain is loath to come, and the air, if possible, seems still more oppressive than before. Taking shelter in a shed on the edge of the wood, we watch the approaching tempest. Presently there is a significant roar in the distance—not of the thunder, but of the on-coming rain and wind. Bushes and

trees now swing and rustle gently, and the next minute the storm is on us. We just hear a cock Pheasant near cry in defiance, while from the stream comes the cry of a startled Moor-hen as she calls her young; and then minor voices are drowned in the greater commotion.

With one mighty rush the wind catches the trees, and in less than a minute the lately dry ground is receiving the welcome drops of water. A dazzling flash of lightning shows us the wood for a second—a picture which is impressed permanently on the mind. Leaves are flying everywhere, and great strong trees are bending to the gale. Then thunder strikes earth and heaven, and the report frightens all living creatures in the wood. Another blinding flash, and another picture is seen—one also to be lastingly remembered. A little bird is blown from its perch, and is fluttering and struggling against two of Nature's mightiest forces—wind and rain.

What a spectacle for poets and painters to look upon is a woodland storm at night! Each flash of lightning reveals a grand picture which is vividly photographed on the mind. When walking through these woods in daylight we do not see them as they are shown by Nature's electric nocturnal light. There is the winding path—only a track—bordered high and thick with flowers and nettles. Each tree is brought out with rare distinctness: curious shapes,

indeed, do the branches momentarily appear to assume; weird black shadows are cast by them, while the whole wood is illumined with a kind of ghostly light. The roar and rumbling of the thunder now drowns all other sounds; crash follows crash with supernatural-like force; it is as though the forest trees were being split and were crashing on to the ground. Between these thunder-claps there is a continual roar, as the echo comes back from the far-off hills and travels along the valley.

As the storm increases in force so the lightning becomes more vivid, and seems to have a bluer hue. One flash especially lights up the wood and seems to strike the ground quite near to where I stand; the thunder is heard with the flash, and it is just one short, sharp crack, like the report of a rifle intensified ten thousand times. A moment of darkness then follows, but falling branches and breaking timber add some diversity, and again lesser sounds are drowned in the returning echo of the great clap of thunder, which seems to shake the whole frame of Nature.

Slowly the storm passes; the lightning somewhat abates and gradually the vast cloud moves farther off. Rain still falls heavily, however, and is converting the ground into a swamp. As the clouds pass on, and the thunder now only rumbles loudly,

a dim light is seen in the east. The crescent moon is just rising, and is dimly seen in a break in the great rolling mass of cloud. The rain falls more lightly, so that again one is able to hear other sounds apart from the storm. Away in the west is seen a star, and as the end of the storm-cloud passes others appear. The wind drops as quickly as it rose, and the rain at last ceases. There is only the drip, drip, as the water falls from the trees and hits the sodden vegetation below.

What a contrast is the calm now reigning in the wood to the late tempest! A Thrush utters some notes of his song, and this sounds all the more beautiful after the raging of the elements. Thrushes and others often sing at night; sometimes a noise will set them off, but at other times their practice is not to be explained. To-night their notes give a sense of relief, and seem to add charm to the restored quietness of night in the wood. It might be likened to a reassuring sign of Nature telling that the storm is past, and that the solemn stillness of night has followed.

Leaving our shelter to pass along the woodland border, we enter the wood higher up, where the undergrowth is not so thick. After travelling about three hundred yards under the larger trees we come to an open space. Near the middle of this is a white object, which on closer inspection is seen to be a tree

split to pieces. It was this tree that the lightning struck when at its nearest. Branches are torn off and converted into splinters, nearly every piece of bark is stripped from the trunk; and all lies in a confused heap. Round and about the base of what is left of the trunk is a heap of splintered touchwood. There are taller trees near, and it is singular that the lightning should have singled out this pollard willow.

Farther along the meadow is the Nightingale's home. The last time that I saw this the mid-day sun was shining. A cluster of furze bushes stood around, relieved here and there by small trees; brilliant yellow furze blossoms and many other gay-tinted flowers were to be seen among the thick matted undergrowth. It is a wild corner, well secluded, and a place into which intruders seldom enter, and is therefore just the abode which a Nightingale loves.

Midnight has nearly come when he commences to sing. The first notes ring out loud and clear, and are carried far into the wood; then a long silence ensues. Is he listening for a rival to strike up? Nightingales always sing best when another is near; and a curious thing is that the best singer usually continues singing long after all others have become silent. At last there comes, in this instance, an answering song from the far distance, which can

barely be heard, but the little brown bird near at hand has quicker ears, and commences to reply in earnest.

Never did I hear a bird sing like this one ; I took careful notice on the spot of the number of times some of the notes were repeated. Once the loud, flute-like whistle was repeated thirty-five times, and no written words could give any adequate idea of the beauty of these. The first few notes were short ; but as they continued, they rose in the most perfect crescendo until the twenty-fifth note was reached. Then, still lengthening, they softly died away, meanwhile sinking to a lower tone. Only once were they repeated thirty-five times in succession, but frequently they were uttered twenty-five times. The shorter whistle was given twenty-nine times, and the *jug-jug* that some Nightingale lovers so much admire, forty times in succession. I have never listened to a more perfect singer, and to-night, after the thunder-storm, the performance is more captivating than ever. The notes are full of pathos, now mournful, then characterised by silvery liquidness. In each note there is rare charm, and the whole is a magnificent triumph, that carries with it an indescribable fascination. Heard now in this lone, wild spot, when the wood is silent and sleeping, it soothes our very soul. There are notes soft enough not to awake the lightest sleeper, but these swell into a wild rush of

melody, only to sink again into music which inspires pensive sadness. The surroundings add to the charm, and help to make the Nightingale's song what it is. The clear shining stars, and the bright crescent of the moon, ever and anon breaking out from among still straggling thunder-clouds, give out enough light to make the scene more lonely and to bring out its seclusion. Trees stand out against the inky sky in all kinds of weird or fantastic shapes; and the silence between the singer's notes can almost be felt. Hour after hour we listen to Tennyson's

> 'Wild bird, whose warble liquid sweet,
> Rings Eden through the budded quicks.'

The trees now begin slowly to assume their natural shapes, and the stillness of night seems passing off the land. The eastern sky becomes lighter; a chill wind sweeps over the ground. Heavy, low-hanging mist hovers about the grass, and the charm of early night is fast departing; but the Nightingale still sings.

Suddenly, however, a Blackbird is heard from the wood heralding the coming dawn: the effect is magical. It is a signal for all birds that day is breaking; and Thrushes and Robins respond in their own way. A beam of light rises in the east from behind the clouds, and presently the land is flooded with a yellow light. Hundreds of Warblers are now singing, and from the meadow comes a Lark to pour

out his simple little song of love. The Nightingale still utters a few straggling notes, but the charm of his song ended with the last twinkles of the morning star, when the sun's brighter beams appeared over his wild home.

The Nightingale is said to cease singing as soon as its young are hatched; and this is correct as far as the louder notes, which we hear while the hen is sitting, are concerned. The male bird often sings after the young are hatched, however. If readers will take the trouble, as I have done, of concealing themselves near a Nightingale's nest when the young are hatched, they will still hear the cock singing. Every note will be heard—but how different from what it was! Instead of being loud, and filling the wood with its sound, it is now so subdued as to be scarcely audible at a distance of four yards. These are not just odd notes repeated at random, but all the song exactly as repeated earlier in the season, the only difference being as described. This is an interesting fact, such as I have not seen mentioned elsewhere. There is much to learn about the habits of even our commonest birds. If persons interested in them would penetrate into the birds' own wild homes, much would be seen and discovered that would charm and instruct such observers.

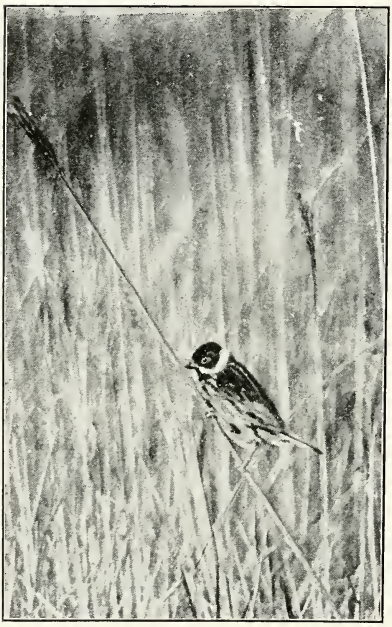
XVI

Buttercup Meadow

BUTTERCUP MEADOW is bordered on one side by a small wood, at another side by an orchard which not long ago was clothed with a mantle of glistening white blossoms, relieved here and there with patches of pink showing where apple trees stood among the rest. Along one side of the meadow flows a small brook, but large enough to afford shelter for several pairs of Moor-hens. Dividing the stream from the meadow is a hedge covered with the most beautiful of summer wild roses. At nightfall the air is scented with the perfume of honeysuckle, the flowers of which hang in festoons over the water, thus attracting great numbers of moths.

The meadow is a slightly rising grassy hill, covered with the yellowest of buttercups. Some are tall, standing high above the others, and on the stronger stems Whinchats settle and give forth their song. Where buttercups are more thinly provided daisies

fill the gap, their white star-like faces being turned towards the sun. Butterflies—bluer than the sky—flit here and there in the sunshine, and Tortoiseshell butterflies also are about; and nearer the orchard Orange-tips are skimming along. Just beyond the hedge, in the wood, grows a silver poplar, and its leaves rustle as the wind turns them up, and when the sunbeams catch their underside they are as bright as the wavelets on the brook. Taller grasses, near the stream, are constantly swaying as Reed-Buntings alight on their slender stems. Already they have a brood, and are feeding them every few minutes. Hidden among the daisies, and surrounded by buttercups, there is a Sky-Lark's nest with four eggs. The hen is sitting, and high up over the flowers her mate



REED-BUNTING (HEN) ON REED.

circles, carolling forth his song of love, making those who hear it more happy, while adding to the joy of a radiant spring morning.

As I rest among yellow flowers, listening to his song and watching butterflies and the antics of tiny blue dragonflies dancing over the grass, thoughts wander back to past summers, when the great oak near the wood was younger, but still stood up as the centre of similar scenes. What would one not give to look on some of the sights of mediæval days which this now rugged weather-worn tree has stood among. Here Tudor and Stuart kings hunted the stag, and an old writer, speaking of Enfield Chase, of which this meadow forms part, says of it: 'A solitary desert, yet stor'd with not less than three thousand deere.' 'Desert' is a misnomer for a piece of charming wild country the like of which Middlesex will never possess again. I can imagine that along this self-same stream a hunted stag would endeavour to escape the hounds by putting them off the scent by taking to the waterway. In such a wild tract there must have been more birds and a greater variety of species, for the balance of Nature was not checked as is the case in these days; now if a rare bird shows itself its life is endangered by powder and shot. Then the birds were free throughout the year, and were not persecuted by collectors, as is the case

at present. Larks sang as sweetly then—and perhaps more sweetly, for they were left in possession of favourite grounds, with the limitless expanse of blue above. My thoughts go back still further ; I think of ancient Druids with their pagan rites cutting mistletoe from the trees in the ancient wood, and I try to imagine what it was like to be abroad in the unenclosed forest in those days. What birds there must have been,—such birds as English people will never look upon again, unless the land should once more become depopulated and go back to its wooded condition. Our most interesting birds are fast disappearing, and some will soon be extinct as a breeding species. Unless a bird-loving population takes the place of the fashionable generation of 'murderous millinery' and greedy collecting, a better outlook may not be expected.

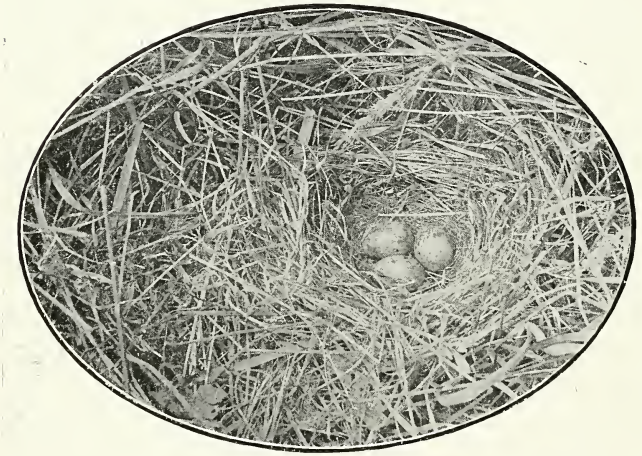
A Carrion-Crow startles me with his loud cry, and flies over Buttercup Meadow. Such a bird seems to be out of place among the harmony and many-coloured scene of this fresh spring day. He settles on a bare branch of a dead tree and calls again several times ; long he stays there, and for a time is not thought about. There are other nests besides the Lark's in Buttercup Meadow. Alongside the brook, on the bank, a Yellow-Hammer has built, and the hen, when I passed, was away and the four beautifully marked eggs could be seen by carefully

moving aside the thick herbage. In a tree near by the male keeps on repeating his song, which country people understand as, *a little bit o' bread and no-o cheese.* When the full complement of eggs are laid the hen will not leave the nest until practically taken off. I have heard of cases in which the hen has been killed by a passing cart-wheel while she was faithfully performing the duty of incubation.

YOUNG WHITETHROATS IN NEST.

Nearly in the centre of the meadow stands a small bush, almost hidden by nettles, grass, and buttercups. Here a pair of Whitethroats have their home. When any one approaches, the hen quietly leaves her eggs and calls angrily, *hurr, kurr,* her head- and throat-feathers being erected, and her whole body showing signs of fear and anger. I have watched the occupants of this bush without

their knowing, their behaviour then being very different. The scene was one of love and happiness. The male would continually feed his mate with such choice little pieces of food as he was able to find; the hen would return this affection with fluttering and other prettily captivating signs of pleasure. Once



TREE-PIPIT'S NEST.

or twice during the day she would leave the nest, when her companion would immediately take her place. Not far from these Whitethroats is a Tree-Pipit's nest. One of these would every now and then alight on the little bush, presently to ascend to about the height of the oak, singing loudly; then, with outspread wings and calling *see-ar, see-ar, see-ar,*

he slowly descends until the bush is again reached. In this way he spends the hours and days of spring, breaking off in a song to look for food with which to feed his brown mate in their neat little home skilfully hidden in the grass.

The prevailing tint of Buttercup Meadow is, of course, yellow. Besides buttercups there are dandelions with their larger discs, supplemented by paler cowslips, growing in clusters, mostly hidden by buttercups. Trailing among the grass are patches of bird's-foot trefoil with their 'butterfly' flowers of brightest yellow. Before all of these flowered, when spring was younger, the lesser celandine and primrose brightened the hedge-banks and ditches with their brilliant forms. The one with bright star-like petals reminded many a passer-by that spring was near at hand.

The meadow is full of life and music; in the air above, in the grass beneath, wherever one looks, there is some show of joyous life. One becomes enchanted with the quick-moving pageant of spring. Lying among buttercups I can take note of many varied and charming growths; and each new object or bird's song appeals to one, until we are, as it were, transfixed. It is hard to leave such a scene, so deeply enchanting are its ever-fresh and ever-varying characteristics.

On grass stems Whinchats swing to and fro and

cry *utick-utick*; in the oak a merry Chiff-chaff calls; and Cuckoos cry from the orchard. A blue butterfly settles on a flower to bathe its azure wings in the sunshine; a white cloud floats before the sun, and shadows fall for a moment on the meadow; the butterfly closes its wings, and becomes so like its surroundings that it is almost lost sight of. What a tiny thing this butterfly is, and yet how perfectly formed and marked! Although so small, it enjoys the sun's warmth; its wings are now quickly opened again, and it floats away, happy and free amongst its own lovely world of scented flowers. Humble-bees hasten past; one stops, returns, then settles on a buttercup; and, while extracting the sweet

NEST OF BULLFINCH.

pollen from the flower, the stem bends, and he tumbles into the tangled grass ; humming loudly, he extracts himself and flies away. Gaily-coloured beetles cross the path, and are lost to sight in the thick grass. From the hedgerow a Greenfinch has called many times, and now he is feeding in the meadow. The

GREENFINCH'S NEST.

Pipit continually soars and sings loudly, and above, towards the blue sky, there is also harmony ; for high up, near the clouds, the Lark still sings. Between the Greenfinch's notes a Wryneck calls ; this now leaves its nest in an old tree, settles in the meadow, and is lost sight of among the flowers ; and Willow-

Wrens chime instead, and fill up the pauses in the other music.

In the honeysuckle hedge a pair of Bullfinches have their nest, and it is almost hidden by wild roses; the hen has just returned from the wood, and her mate, having taken his time at sitting, now hails her return by piping from the branches. A Kestrel floats out from the wood, 'beats' the meadow, then hovers; and shortly its mate appears, and they rise in rings, each going in an opposite direction, until they appear to be no bigger than Larks. Kingfishers pass like a flash, skim over the hedge, and follow the stream. Two Orange-tip butterflies, having strayed from the woodside hedge, fly round and round one another, rise high in the air, and while one goes over the oak, the other returns and flits along the hedge, just settles on some red campion, and then floats over the wild roses. A short distance down stream a rustic bridge spans the banks, and there is evidence that a pair of Pied Wagtails have their nest there; for again and again one of the birds passes,—shooting, as it were, through the air with half-closed wings. Finches that fly past have this same characteristic; many will settle, and their song-talk goes on in a never-ending strain.

The Lark comes down from the clouds and returns to his mate and nest among the buttercups, but does not stay long; again he rises, singing as sweetly as

before. Missel-Thrushes have been repeatedly calling, and they now lead out their young to teach them how to find food for themselves. The old birds discover the food, then show it with their beaks, and the youngsters run forward quickly and devour it. The Carrion-Crow, which for long has been in the

YOUNG SONG-THRUSH.

old tree, now leaves his perch and enters the meadow grass.

Yonder, far away over the farmhouse, are tiny specks darting about; these are Martins, many of their nests being under the eaves. Great numbers of Sparrows also build in the ivy growing on the

walls. Martins are usually shy of places where Sparrows abound,—no doubt owing to the latter's fondness for their nests. Swallows build in the barns beyond, and they repeatedly fly to the lower meadow-land and return later with supplies for their mates. The snap of their beak can be heard when they catch a fly, and often an insect can be seen flying swiftly in order to dodge its pursuer.

Buttercup Meadow is full of tokens of love. Birds caring for their young, others feeding their mates, Wood-Pigeons' notes, which themselves seem to speak of love, ever and anon reach one from woodland bowers. Finches' songs are really love-talk; so also are those of Willow-Wrens and twittering Swallows. Reed-Buntings swinging on grass stems also utter their love-songs; while butterflies seem attracted to the flowers by love. The varied petals, though only flowers, are to me more than mere spring growths; they speak of happiness, and seem full of beautiful spring. The whole meadow-land is overflowing with joy; the air is filled with the love-notes of birds.

But suddenly this harmony is broken. From the direction of the Lark's nest there is a loud angry note—*harrr*! I spring up, and see that the nest has been robbed by the Carrion-Crow. Round and round flutters the smaller bird, uttering plaintive cries, and when I reach the site she too flies away. There were two broken eggs, another was smashed, one lay

outside, the other was gone. The Lark above has stopped singing. Descending quickly, he settles in another part of the meadow, his sorrowful mate flying thence to join him.

I return still to rest among the buttercups. Whinchats rest on flower stalks, and Swallows sail overhead. Butterflies flit about, and humble-bees buzz past. The Kingfishers return and dart down the stream ; their gay colours look more sombre than before. Finches call and twitter ; Willow-Wrens utter their undulating notes ; but it seems as though sadness now enters into their songs. Was it fancy, or do the birds also know that, amid all this spring sunshine in Buttercup Meadow, there had come gloom ; for a pair of its most gay and hopeful inhabitants were distressed by the spoliation of their little home by an enemy which haunted the foliage and the flowers?

STAG BEETLE.

XVII

A Suburban Park

BIRDS very readily discover places where they are protected. In one or two instances which have come under my notice, a surprising and varied number of species have taken up their abode in such favoured spots. Although the birds in our suburban park were, strictly speaking, not really *protected*, no one was allowed to molest them to any great extent, which amounted to much the same thing as protection.

The Park itself consists of what may be described as an extensive field, surrounded by a fringe of ornamental trees. A border of thick bushes grew at their base, and then there was a high untrimmed hedge. Inside this wide circle one was completely shut off from the outside world—the border being so dense that nothing of the woods and fields beyond could be seen. A stream ran through the park, dividing the greensward into two fields in which sheep and cattle were contentedly grazing. One or

two clusters of magnificent elms stood at different points, and cows were reclining in the cooler air of the shadows cast by the trees.

The grass in places slopes gradually to the green bank of the stream; in other parts the brook sides are steep and covered with many flowers. A pair of Kingfishers have their home here; they can be seen at certain times on their 'stands.' These birds have favourite perches, and return to them very punctually at the same time each day. Bullfinches breed each year in the hedge surrounding the park. It is just the kind of hedge they prefer, being high and thick. Two Redstarts dodge here and there, and have their nest near; while Chiffchaffs call loudly from different points. A giant tree still lies as it fell, having been blown down some years ago during a winter storm. The bark is now stripping, leaving bare white boughs, on which Flycatchers sit between their eager excursion flights after flies.

During last spring (1900) I had seen a pair of Kestrels day after day, but was unable for some time to discover their nest. Eventually I found that they had appropriated a Crow's deserted nest, built in an elm in this park. The nest was at the top of one of the tallest trees in a group of six. It had been unoccupied for two years; probably the Kestrels restored the work to some extent, as

it was in very good condition when they had possession.

I was in the park one morning, photographing a Tree-Sparrow's nest, and while focussing this I heard strange noises overhead. Looking upward, I saw one of the Kestrels and a Carrion Crow fighting in mid air over the nest which the Kestrels now occupied, but which at one time belonged to this now incensed Crow. Each combatant was endeavouring to get above the other by ascending in circles. The Crow, in attacking, made desperate attempts to strike at the Hawk. The Kestrel, however, with far superior power of wing, eluded these onslaughts, and got above his enemy. Each time the Crow dashed at him, the Hawk made

HOME OF THE KESTREL.

a fine upward swoop, without any visible movement of his wings. Now they were both low down; then a few seconds later they were high up. The Kestrel was leading the Crow, and waiting for a favourable opportunity to strike. At last this came: the Hawk had made a rapid upward swoop, the Crow was following, when instantly the Hawk turned and caught his opponent unawares. When one looks on some panoramic scene there are always certain things that attract more attention than others; they seem to live in the memory, and can always be recalled to mind. It was so with this aërial combat. The Kestrel stopped in his flight, turned, faced the Crow, and then struck while the latter was coming on. The Hawk was a picture of fierceness; he flapped his wings rapidly, with tail feathers spread out and head bent forward, while his feet were raised facing the Crow, the claws being ready for striking. The Crow waited a moment and faced the Kestrel in a similar way. It was a picture of fierce passions having vent such as one seldom sees in Nature's everyday life. The Hawk finally made another majestic sweep downwards, then he was up again above the Crow. All this time the angry Kestrel was uttering defiant notes, *check*, *check*, while the other responded in short and still harsher cries. They got near and yet nearer to the nest, and at last the fight was going on immediately overhead.

Upward went the Kestrel once more, higher and higher, the Crow eagerly following; but suddenly the latter dropped like a stone towards the tree wherein the nest was built. With angry cries the Kestrel then followed, like a brown dart falling from the clouds. But the Crow had reckoned without taking account of his opponent's mate, which was guarding the nest, so that when he neared the group of elms the hen Kestrel dashed out to meet the enemy, who was now between two fires. Acting on the principle that discretion is the better part of valour, the defeated Crow made his escape from his two furious antagonists. The hen returned to her nest, while her mate sailed round and about the park, a harsh *kraar* being heard, showing that the Crow was still watching for his opportunity; but I did not see any further attack.

I am pleased to be able to say that the Kestrels' eggs were hatched, and the young were reared, and gave me many hours' enjoyment in watching their interesting actions. One attempt was made by some one to reach the nest and take the young, but happily it proved unsuccessful. When the bird-spoiler was half way up the high elm, a timely blizzard of rain and wind came on. It was all the man could do to hold on to the branches while the storm lasted; and when it ceased he descended, somewhat cowed, and I hope a wiser man. I offered bribes to persons

who knew of the nest to prevent their taking the young birds, and where bribes were ineffective I reminded them of the Wild Birds' Protection Acts and the penalties that would be inflicted if the fledgelings were molested. Indebted both to threatenings and bribes, the young Kestrels left their nest, although then the new danger of powder and shot threatened them. By further reminders of the laws of England, the birds for many weeks lived in safety, although I believe that two are now in a glass case while one was trapped. The other I have not seen, or been able to trace. The old birds still frequent the park, and will, I hope, return to the nest this spring.

I made many attempts to photograph these birds, and waited in the park for three days, hoping to do so. Most of this time was spent in hiding in a tree, and in none too comfortable a position. It was a long time to wait, and served no good purpose, as I was unable to expose a single plate. However, the time was not quite wasted; for although I did not get a picture, the Kestrels afforded much entertainment. Perhaps the most interesting thing was one of the parent Hawks giving lessons in flying to the youngsters. A steady breeze was blowing from the south-west; the day was hot and almost cloudless. The Kestrels were in one of the tallest trees in the park, and at the top were some bare

branches, which made it better for observation. The old Kestrel flew out facing the wind, then made a wide half-circle to the opposite side of the tree, and then sailed against the wind with outspread wings and settled on the branch she had left. Then one of the young would make a similar attempt, to succeed tolerably well, until in trying to settle, it missed the perch and had to circle round again as if to regain confidence. Another young bird also tried to imitate its daring comrade, but both missed their foothold in a most amusing way. When at last these two were successful, the others tried their best, and kept on sailing against the wind until they were apparently perfected in this practice. In the afternoon the flying lesson was repeated; but the young had so quickly learnt this art that more tuition was hardly necessary.

The parents were constantly bringing food to their young. I lost sight of the latter at times; but whenever the older birds returned one could easily know of their whereabouts. Before the Kestrel with the food could reach the tree in which the young were, all four would fly forward to take the expected meal, and would cluster round calling *plee-e-e-e, plee-ar, plee-ar, plee-ar, plee-ar, plee-ar.* The first note was slightly the longest, the others being rapidly uttered. It is a musical cry, and can be heard at a great distance. I think that *plee-ar* presents the sound as near as it is possible to give bird language

on paper. I heard the notes many hundred times during my long wait; at times the young settled in the very tree in which I was concealed.

When food was brought in the way described, the young birds tried to take it from their mother while on the wing; but she always preferred to settle first. Whether it was divided equally between all I cannot say. It must be no small matter to collect supplies for four hungry youngsters, such as any one who has kept Hawks in confinement can testify the young ones to be.

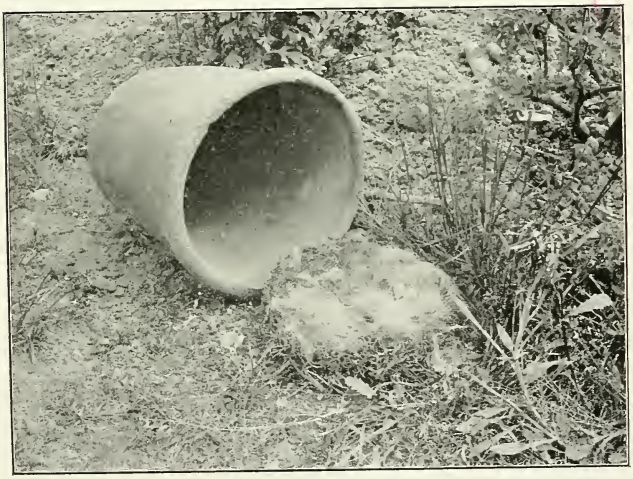
At all times the flight of Kestrels is particularly graceful and buoyant, whether they are 'beating' arable land, hovering over a meadow, or soaring. The last is the most beautiful—and is even wonderful. Day after day during one spring I was able to watch two Kestrels going through this exercise. It is necessary to watch a pair to see the soaring performance to the best advantage. Two were flying round about my home, when one commenced to soar in small circles without any noticeable movement of wing; the other joined, and went in an opposite direction. I stood immediately underneath, and so could observe the perfect spiral circles which were made as they constantly crossed each other's course. At last they were like dots in the sky and were lost to view.

For many weeks, at three oclock in the afternoon

one of the Kestrels could always be seen hovering in the same place. Several times I waited with my gun-camera among some fruit trees to try to photograph the bird in the act of hovering. Once I was able to get the image of the bird in the finder of my gun-camera, and focussed it; but before exposure waited a second hoping to have a nearer view; instead the Kestrel got farther away, and an opportunity did not occur again.

It is to be regretted that Kestrels are persecuted in the way they are by farmers and gamekeepers who are ignorant of their habits. The number of mice and grain-eating birds, such as Sparrows and other Finches, which they destroy can hardly be exaggerated; and if they do sometimes take a young chicken, surely they repay for the privilege by the good they otherwise do. When other food is plentiful I have proved that they will not molest poultry. I procured two small white chickens—most attractive from a Kestrel's standpoint—and then allowed them to run about in the field when the young Kestrels were leaving their nest, at the stage when they require most food; but although the old Kestrels several times flew near to the lively white birds they did not attempt to molest them. I left them in the field for nearly thirty hours in all, so that I think I had proof that Kestrels are not such black birds as they are painted by unthinking

FLOWER-POT UNDER WHICH A PAIR OF GREAT-TITS BUILT THEIR NEST.



THE NEST DISCLOSED.

people. Underneath the tree in which they nested were the remains of Sparrows and many other small birds, and in their castings were the remains of mice and beetles.

The Carrion-Crow that fought the Kestrel had a nest near and brought up a brood, but I was unable to find the site. If these came near the Kestrels they were always driven away. A number of Missel-Thrushes fed in the field, and often drove off the Hawks if they came too close. Wood-Pigeons, Spotted-Flycatchers, and Titmice bred near without being touched ; so that, altogether, the park contained a great variety of bird life.

I give here two photographs of a Great-Tit's nest built in a very curious position. The flower-pot stood at the side of a pathway in a garden on the boundary of the park. Two eggs were laid, and then the birds deserted it, owing to the pot being constantly lifted. The whole of the space at the bottom of the inverted pot was filled up with moss to the depth of about two inches ; the diameter of this platform of moss and hair was eight inches, but only a small cup-shaped depression, measuring two and a half inches across, was used for the nest proper. I have found Tits' nests in a great variety of situations, but I think this is the most remarkable.

What affection a bird has for a certain nesting site is often noticed. In this park I have known

a pair of Tree-Sparrows to build in the same crevice in a tree for ten years, and a photograph is here reproduced of this site. Not many yards away was another site chosen by one of the same species, and this has been used yearly for the same length of time. When I photographed the latter the young were just leaving, and I was able to expose a plate on one of them. In the park was also another old tree, with a long horizontal hole in one of the branches; this too has contained a Tree-Sparrow's nest for ten consecutive years to my knowledge. Whether they are the same three pairs of birds that have occupied these holes it would be impossible to say. If not actually the same pair year after year, they are probably descendants, or

SITE OF TREE-SPARROW'S NEST, X = ENTRANCE.

most likely follow in the same lines as the Irish wit's celebrated cricket bat, which first had a new handle and after a while a new blade, and was called by its owner the same bat. If one bird is destroyed, or dies, the one remaining quickly gets another companion. In Morris's *British Birds* we read of a Magpie that had six mates during one nesting season ; one after the other these were destroyed, the last one sitting on the eggs laid by the first.

YOUNG TREE-SPARROW AT ENTRANCE TO NESTING-HOLE.

The Tree-Sparrow can be distinguished from the House-Sparrow at a distance by its habit of jerking its tail sideways every few seconds ; and also by its note, which is something like the House-Sparrow's, but a little more refined ; both notes are difficult to put

on paper. With a field-glass its red head serves to distinguish it from the House-Sparrow. About April, numbers of Tree-Sparrows haunt the arable land of North London suburbs, and congregate with other Finches. Their nests are fairly common in this district, holes in pollarded willows being favourite places. Before nesting operations begin, they roost together in the bushes fringing a stream. I was standing near these one evening in April, when one settled within a yard, and stayed there for about fifteen minutes. There was an uninterupted space between us, and I thought it rather strange that it should remain in such a position, but silence and stillness will win the confidence of almost any wild creature.

Tawny Owls breed in this favoured park; no egg-collector as yet having found their well-hidden nesting-sites, nor do I think they will do so. The young of each year are to be seen abroad at dusk, soon after they leave their nest. Most country dwellers are familiar with the musical hoot of these Owls. It is very easy to imitate by clasping the two hands together, and by blowing into them between the thumbs. I was in the park one evening, and called the whole family to within a few yards of me in this way. One of the young birds, more inquisitive than the rest, came quite close, and had it not been for the warning cry of its elders, which spied

me in hiding, I believe it would have come quite up to me. Some of our wildest birds can be attracted by imitating their calls. Naturalists are aware of the wary habits of the Lapwing in the nesting season, yet I have called even one of these within photographing distance by imitating its call-note—*pee-wit*. Each call was answered by me in the same way as the bird called. Sometimes it only cried *pee-e-e*, then gave a lengthened *pee-e-e-wit*. Every time I answered it ran a few yards nearer, and then stood perfectly still and listened. If there had not been a long, but narrow pond separating us, the bird might have approached even up to the thick hedge in which I was concealed. Another Lapwing joined in; and both seemed terribly surprised when I jumped up and showed myself. A very short period of time then sufficed to separate us by a mile or so. My feathered friends were evidently suffering from that uncomfortable feeling of having been 'done.'

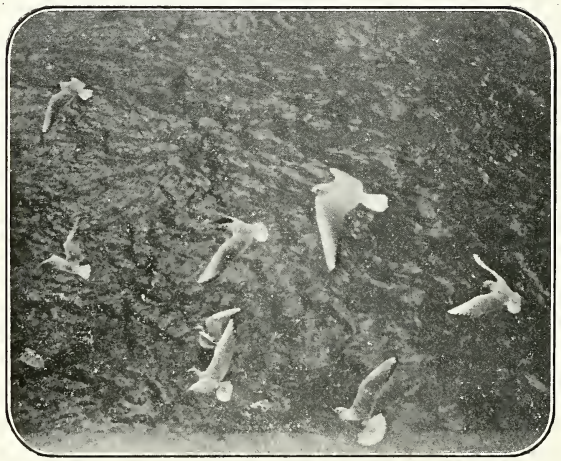
XVIII

Nature on the Kent Coast

ON its eastern horizon the December morning sky is ablaze with an increasing redness. A ray of deep crimson rises from behind the foam-lashed sea, and then the red orb of the rising sun seems to rise out of the waves. The line of red increases to a broad band of a deeper colour, widening as it touches the shore, and ending with a halo round the sun. The whole surface of the sea is now tinted with red, producing a beautiful effect. The waves in the path of the sun are most wonderful to look at, for when the furious wind drives them on the black rocks, their spray seems to be turned into blood, while the water is forced high up on the shingle to fade into a paler colour, until it falls back and is caught by another crimson wave.

Black-headed Gulls, clothed in their winter plumage, slowly sailing in the teeth of the gale, have their snow-white plumage transformed into the prevailing tint; fishing-boats also assume the same

colour. The few clouds above now have the deep red reflected on their ever-changing forms. Slowly the sun rises, soon to be concealed among a mass of drifting clouds.

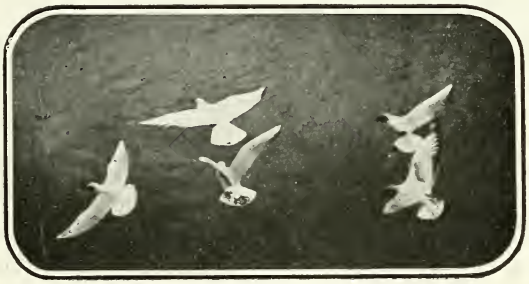


FLYING ACROSS THE WIND.
BLACK-HEADED GULLS (WINTER PLUMAGE).

At a given signal, as it were, the whole appearance of the water is now changed. The spray is again white ; the waves are again green, except near the clear horizon, where they remain red. With a seeming rush, three gigantic beams of carmine shoot from behind the lowest clouds and travel over the sky. In a moment they too have gone, and the sun reappears,

bathed in a mist of brightest yellow. The crimson has gone, and we look upon a sea of gold. Clouds float away from before the sun, and in a few minutes the sea, sky, and land present the ordinary outlook of a cold December morning.

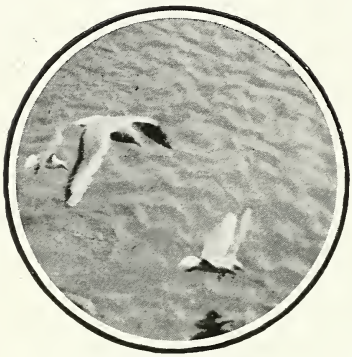
The tide is going out, and a Pied-Wagtail is busily running about the fringe of seaweed left at high-water mark. Food is so plentiful that he cannot spare time to notice intruders, and I am thus able to get quite



A FLIGHT ROUND.
BLACK-HEADED GULLS (WINTER PLUMAGE).

close. On the low grass-covered chalk cliffs a Rock-Pipit is calling *peet, peet.* After a long search with a field-glass I can just see this before it leaves the cliff for the water's edge. Many of the small rocks are uncovered; between them are patches of sand sparingly covered with shells and various-sized stones. Little pools containing shrimps, crabs, and other kinds of fish lie here and there among the rocks. Green-

finches and Sparrows, which have been waiting on the cliffs, now fly to the sand to feed. Finches are now in their gayest plumage, some of the males being extremely handsome, and vie with Stonechats in showing the brightest feathers of any birds of the coast.



A NECK-AND-NECK RACE.
BLACK-HEADED GULLS.

Black-headed Gulls are 'beating' up and down the shore just above the breaking waves; larger Herring-Gulls are standing on the sand. A Common Gull in the mottled plumage of its first year picks up a small starfish, and instead of eating this where it was found, flies to a more secluded spot. Others follow and try to take the food away, all calling *squeet, squeet*; but the owner, amid the noise and confusion, gets clear away, and flies over the Herring-Gulls. One of the latter quickly gives chase, and soon overtakes the smaller bird. The two circle round and round, hardly taking the slightest notice where they go; sometimes they are close to me, then high up overhead. The Black-headed Gull makes a dart downwards, and while so doing the Herring-Gull

snatches the starfish from its beak and descends to the sand, and leisurely enjoys its stolen repast. Wherever many Gulls are together there is always much fighting, the larger and stronger birds feeding at the expense of the smaller.

GOING DOWN WIND.
BLACK-HEADED GULLS.

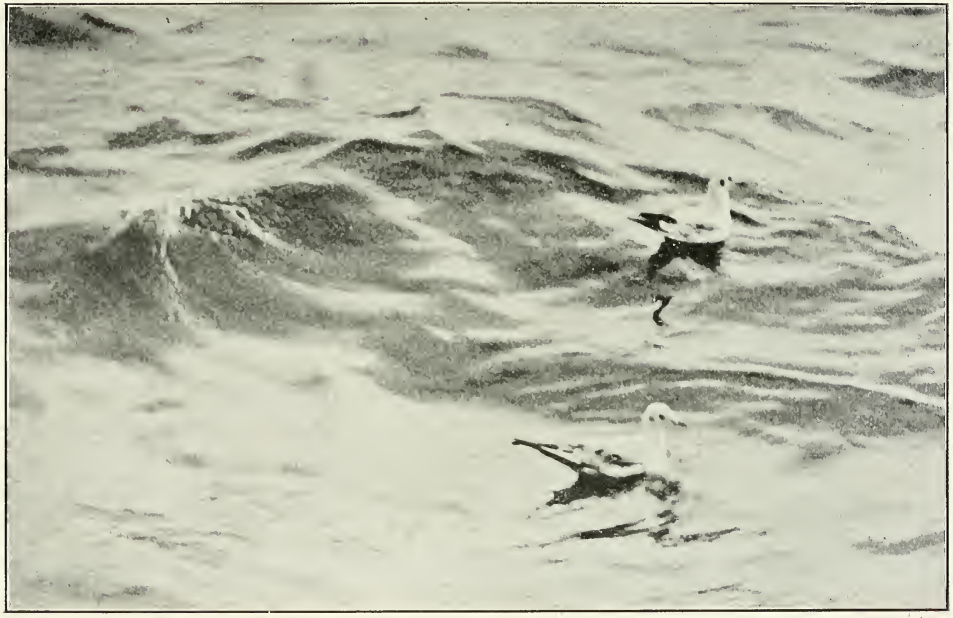
The chalk cliffs rise higher as I walk along the beach. In places where the water touches, they are fast wearing and falling. A green growth shows the height to which the sea reaches. Here are several small caves, which are filled with water at high tide; while great blocks of chalk above them look as if a touch would bring them down; but such is not the case—they are all firmly fixed. The rocks nearest the cliffs are covered with green seaweed; those a little distance out are black; while those near low-water-mark are brown. In the pools, seaweeds of many beautiful forms and colours can be found; but when taken from the water they resemble so many pieces of mere wet rag. It seems to me that these lovely things should have a better name than *seaweed*.

The heaps of what some people call rubbish on the seashore really contain some of the most beautiful and instructive growths. There are small bunches of seaweed of the most delightful and delicate tints: white, brown, and green fern-shaped stems as fine as feathers; transparent pieces resembling the various shapes of a piece of coral; lovely red streamers of hair-like textures; and a hundred other varieties. Some are fixed to shells or pieces of stones. Those in the larger pools are the best, for their shapes are shown to perfection, as they branch out from the rocks and float in the crystal water.

'Call us not Weeds—we are flowers of the Sea;
For lovely, and bright, and gay-tinted are we;
Our blush is as deep as the rose of thy bowers:
Then call us not Weeds—we are Ocean's gay Flowers.'

'Not nursed like the plants of a summer parterre,
When gales are but sighs of an evening air;
Our exquisite, fragile, and delicate forms
Are nursed by the ocean and rocked by its storms.'

Flocks of shore birds are flying in a southerly direction along the beach; a few miles away the cliffs give place to a far-extending flat sandy shore, leading on to marshy fields and reed-bordered meadows. When one reaches this expanse it is to look upon a busy scene. The whole of this extensive marsh is dotted with hundreds of birds. It is almost impossible to get near them, the weather not being



BLACK-HEADED GULLS (WINTER PLUMAGE) AT HOME.

frosty and food being plentiful. However, many large flocks pass quite near overhead, and they fly towards the distant water, the tide to-day having gone out for at least a mile.

A wedge-shaped flock of Ducks come along the shore; I thought they would settle, but instead of doing that they fly steadily onward, and as they near me the leader drops behind and one of the others takes his place. There is a swish of wings as twenty Curlew dash past; they fly low down in single file, and alight near a large flock of Dunlin. The latter rise all together, after the manner of Starlings, and fly round in a large circle. As they turn, their white undersides gleam in the sun, and they drop to the sand, and in so doing they from a distance appear like hundreds of pieces of white paper floating down.

Redshanks are uttering their musical whistle as they run round and about the pools; the Curlews enter the water and probe for food with their long sensitive beaks. With a field-glass I can distinctly see all their movements. Some of the birds so much resemble the sand in colour that they are not seen until the shallow water near which they feed shows their reflection. Several Cormorants fly across the bay, and are followed by more Ducks. The numerous Gulls feeding in this mixed colony are the most noisy and quarrelsome; for whenever one obtains food, others invariably attack the finder and take

away the prize. The thousands of birds here devour an enormous amount of food at each fall of the tide. Lug-worms have thrown up their castings all over the sand; there must be millions here. This is the worm that fishermen use so much for bait. It is not very handsome to look at when dug out of the sand; but if placed in a bottle of clear water we see the difference. Its sides have a number of purple and red tufts; these are its gills, with which it is supplied with oxygen from the water. The tunnel which the creature makes is full of interest. The worm secretes a sticky substance with which to line its borings. This hardens the sides

BLACK-HEADED GULL HOVERING.

BLACK-HEADED GULLS LEAVING THE WATER.

of the tunnel, which will sometimes descend to a considerable distance below the surface. On each side of the lug-worm are several pairs of bristle-like feet; these serve as a fulcrum to aid it in making its tunnel.

I walk across the sand to the water; the whole surface, which is flooded at high tide, is now covered with birds' footprints, and the smaller marks

BLACK-HEADED GULLS (WINTER PLUMAGE) WAITING FOR BREAKFAST.

made by Dunlins predominate. There is also a great number of Redshanks', Gulls', and Curlews' footsteps. The sea is calmer and the wind is dropping; but, notwithstanding, each wave is driven a long way over the level sand. As the water runs back some of the Redshanks follow, and then dart quickly inland again when another wave breaks over the sand. The little Dunlins, however, are the most

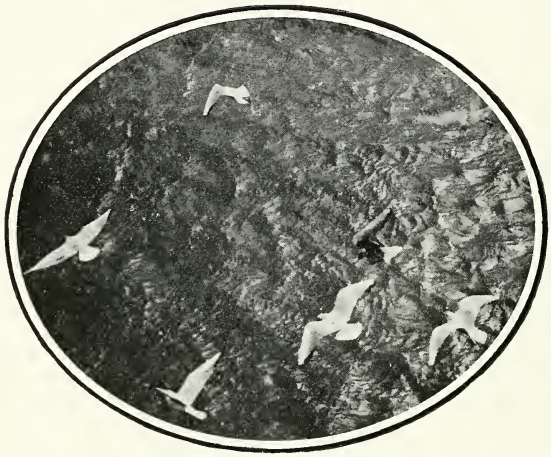
graceful in their actions; they run here and there rapidly, then jump up and skim over a breaking wave, looking like a handful of lighter spray. From a distance the birds might be supposed to form part of the drifting foam.

The day wears on, and the sun in the clear

BLACK-HEADED GULLS (WINTER PLUMAGE).

December sky has begun to sink towards the deep green meadows, and the tide is returning. Curlews and Redshanks, giving out their clear whistles, are driven closer to the fields. One by one the flocks of snowy-breasted Dunlins fly along the coast, and are presently lost to sight. The larger birds are leaving, and as the sand beach becomes smaller only

a few noisy Gulls are left: and presently these, too, at last go off, and the deep, moaning sea again slowly creeps up to the grassy banks of the meadows. Far out from land there is a bird on the water; it dives and comes up closer to the shore; then again it goes



FLYING AGAINST THE WIND.
BLACK-HEADED GULLS (WINTER PLUMAGE).

under, and I begin to think it will not again show itself nearer, as it remains out of sight so long. However, it rises only about one hundred yards away, and I think it is the Red-necked Grebe, but it does not stay long enough for me to make sure on this point. Some Gulls are gracefully riding on the rolling waves, waiting and watching for food.

With the failing light Ducks, flying in pairs, drop to the saltings in the fields ; they are a long distance down the shore, and it is impossible to approach them.

When the sun has completed his course a grey cold mist drifts from the sea, and passes over the marshy ground, seeming to penetrate to our bones. The tall dry grasses rustle ominously as it passes, and a bird is startled from the reeds as I walk by. With a swish it is gone. Some Meadow-Pipits call their plaintive *weet, weet*, but I cannot see them. As the cold green waves come over the shore, they seem to have a deeper note than when the sun shone on them ; perhaps it is because their deep toning is the only sound now to be heard. In this dull twilight objects look twice their real size. Thus a small Gull flying by is at first mistaken for a Heron, and some of the objects on land look remarkable. The day dies quickly, and as if sadly, in December ; but, although it becomes dark during my walk homewards, many interesting bird-land sounds are still heard. Curlews are whistling, and I hear many other notes of night-feeding birds, all of which sound strange, or even weird, when one is walking alone on this wild Kent coast at night.

XIX

A Plea for the Birds

THE imprisoned Sky-Lark looked through the bars of his cage over a garden enlivened with spring flowers. Beyond the honeysuckle hedge were fields yellow with buttercups, and scented with the aroma of meadow-grass. Still farther on there stretched a valley which resounded with bird songs.

All through the livelong spring day Larks in the meadows poured out their notes,—and all this time the caged bird was a listener. Many times he tried to beat away the wire with his feeble wings; often he endeavoured to soar, only to find how the ugly prison roof of his cage checked such aspirations. A dozen times a Lark near the garden ascended to the clouds and returned to his nest; and once only did the caged bird attempt to answer. Only a few notes were given, and these were so unutterably sad, so pleading and pathetic, that I knew he was thinking of his little nest in a meadow near which he had been caught. The innocent bird could not under-

stand why he should be deprived of the liberty he loved and longed for so ardently.

HEDGE-SPARROW FEEDING YOUNG.

Soon after midday the sunbeams made his cage brighter, and again there was a flutter and a struggle to reach the wide expanse of blue above ; but after

beating the wires and trying to squeeze through the bars, he settled down on the floor of the cage panting, and listened to the songs of birds which were abroad in the free open air.

It is now evening, and the sun is seeming to touch the distant ridge of pines. The most beautiful part of a sunset is when the great ball has sunk behind distant trees. The sky nearest the horizon is green, above which is a long cloud graduating to a point in the north : the upper side is nearly black, underneath it shows deepest crimson ; small patches drift from the northerly point, and keep their colour for some minutes. Higher up, divided by another band of green, is a similar cloud partly hidden by floating balls of fleecy yellow vapour, and above these is the sky, its blue being made deeper by contrast with the crimson.

The scene changes. More clouds pass across the west, showing different colours. Five large dark beams shoot upwards from openings in a lower cloud and glide over many lovely tints. If possible some of the crimson clouds are turned into a deeper red, and now have a lining of coppery-gold. Orange tints take the place of others, and all move slowly past in one grand pageant. In the north is a great red glare, and this moves round to the east. A Wild Duck, flying fast, goes by, and some straggling Rooks are also going homewards. However striking

a sunset may be, it is never complete to me without the additional charm which home-returning birds add to it. Before the last of these have come and gone the colours fade and turn to grey.

The caged Lark had been looking out on this declining spring day. It flew angrily about the small cage, then uttered a plaintive cry, once more fluttered to the roof, and fell to the floor of its prison home. This time it was *dead*!

I thought of the little nest hidden among the daisies in the meadow, and the bright buttercups and other flowers growing there. I remembered the blue sky and the bird that sang there. My thoughts went back to that first day of spring, when Sky-Larks with their loving songs seemed to awake all things to a knowledge of returning life. This bird, which had been cruelly worried to death by an unnatural captivity, had told many people that spring had come; yet, in preference to being reconciled to prison life, it had died, and would thus no more herald the rising sun, or soar towards the blue sky amid the surroundings of Nature which had been loved so well.

Such a fate is practically what happens every year to large numbers of our sweetest song birds; but people still encourage prowling bird-catchers by buying English-caught singers.

During the month of May the woods are as a rule full of wild-bird harmony, but in a certain Surrey

game preserve I visited there was hardly a note to be heard. There was a rare stock of Pheasants, but, with the exception of a solitary Bullfinch which piped from a thorn hedge, there were few other birds to be seen. The Warblers had been frightened from the wood by too frequent reports of the keepers' guns. All birds had been shot that were likely to interfere with the production of game, as well as many others which were quite innocent of any egg-stealing. Surely this is carrying game preserving more than a little too far! But happily such instances are few. The greater number of the woods in which Pheasants are bred are so strictly looked after in regard to trespassers, that thousands of the smaller species of birds are able to build and to rear their young quite unmolested. I was sorry to see a wood which was so thickly stocked with game so empty of other bird life. It could only be through the ignorance of keepers that such a thing would occur. There are some foolish, or rather ignorant, gamekeepers who will destroy numbers of Finches, Woodpeckers, Tit-mice, etc., for no intelligible reason. Fortunately, however, the head-keepers are now beginning to find out that to allow Hawks and Owls in moderation in their coverts really does more good than harm. Especially is this found to be the case in Hertfordshire. During a recent visit I was pleased to see that numbers of Barn-Owls were about after dusk. One

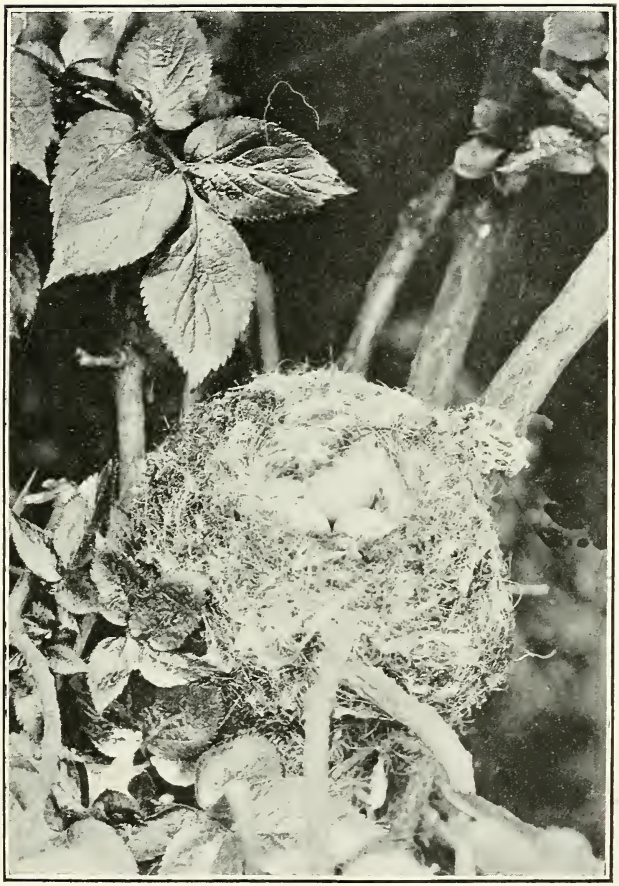
of these useful birds flew immediately over a keeper who carried a loaded gun, and although a tempting shot, no attempt was made to destroy it.

In the more wild country lanes and open fields birds are able to breed unmolested year after year. It is near large towns that the destruction of bird life complained of goes on. Round and about my own home it is really pitiable to notice what a struggle even commoner-place birds have to keep up in order to rear their young. It is no exaggeration to say that only one in twenty of the nests which come under my notice during each season are allowed to remain until the young are able to fly. The first clutches of eggs of nearly every nest built in many miles of hedges are always taken, and so likewise are the second laying; if the eggs do happen to escape notice, the young birds are taken, and I have known boys visit nests each morning, until the young are just ready to fly, and then take them, nest and all, and sell them to London dealers for a few pence. Numbers of young Garden-Warblers, Nightingales, Thrushes, Sky-Larks and Blackbirds are in this way taken away from their native fields to die a miserable death in the shops of London bird dealers. At the end of June and beginning of July, I often find many new nests,—and these belong to birds which have been robbed earlier in the season; this is their last chance, and is mostly successful, as the loafers and

boys who 'work' the hedges usually give up their practice in June.

Losing their eggs and young in this shameful way is not the only danger which common birds have to incur. On Sunday mornings bird-catchers come from London with decoy birds in trap cages. These are placed near the nest of a Chaffinch, a Nightingale, or one corresponding to the species of the decoy bird; and in this way our best song birds are being gradually driven farther from London. When there are young in the nests, these are either taken or left to starve; often they are put on the ground and pounded to death with stones. I have actually found these men catching birds in this way within sight of two notice-boards setting forth the provisions and penalties of the Wild Birds Protection Act.

In our Northern Suburb we have a comparatively short but very charming brook. During each nesting season a pair of Kingfishers take up their quarters on this stream. Every winter, for as many years as I remember, bird-catchers come to this brook and have caught these lovely birds. A few weeks ago the Kingfishers, which are pictured in this volume, were caught in a net placed across the stream. I did all I could to protect them, but single-handed this is no easy matter, as one cannot always be watching. I found the net just too late to save the birds' lives, and I was hoping they would be unmolested, but such



CHAFFINCH'S NEST.

was not the case. The men got away with the birds, and the interesting Kingfishers will not be seen on the banks of this brook for some time to come, or until another pair arrive next spring. It almost makes me wish they would not come; for I know the fate that awaits them.

I consider that such persistent extermination of a species that is far from common, is a disgrace to the county. It could readily be stopped if the authorities were more vigilant and more firm in punishing offenders. One or two local gentlemen are making strenuous efforts to stop this bird-catching; but one asked me what was he to do when even the nests in his garden were found and robbed? A police-constable in plain clothes, in every parish in the outer suburbs should be appointed as a guardian of the birds.

A Kestrel is soaring outside the window while I write; he is before a background of dark woodland, and the winter sun brings out the beautiful markings and hues of his feathers to perfection. I am doing my best to protect this useful bird; but on every occasion that I look upon him I fear it is for the last time.

With the exception of the Kingfishers I have only referred to the destruction of our common birds. In regard to the rarer kinds of breeding birds, I have found during my short experience that it will not only be a shame but an irreparable loss if their eggs

should continue to be so persistently taken. In an uncivilised country birds on the whole enjoy a glorious kind of freedom, but in these advanced Islands, where they are supposed to be protected, their lot is truly a shameful one. The Wild Birds Protection Act is a dead letter as far as all the more rare birds are concerned. With the exception of those privately protected—as for example in certain northern breeding haunts of sea-birds—the eggs of scarce kinds are systematically taken year after year, or until the birds become extinct, or almost so, as a breeding species. Something practical ought to be done by Parliament on behalf of the Nation. Merely posting up printed notices in fields, at railway stations, and in other places, is altogether very ineffective. Indeed, many of the kinds mentioned need no protection, and others are never likely to be seen again in the districts where such notices are placed. One cannot severely blame those who take the eggs: for these are in many cases mere poor rustics, to whom the large reward offered by collectors is a windfall. Some of the marauders do not even know that there is a law forbidding them to take the eggs.

Certain professional naturalists and their agents are the chief offenders. I heard of one dealer who wrote to a man living near one of the haunts of that now most rare British-breeding species—the Kentish

Plover,—offering a substantial sum for *every* clutch of these eggs that the fisherman might be able to send. When it is realised that only about twenty-five pairs of these Plovers breed in the whole of England during each year, and that this man would have been able to discover nearly every nest, he acted right nobly when he refused to respond in any sense to the proposal. A more unscrupulous person might have realised a good sum of money at the cost of helping to drive away these rare birds from almost their last breeding haunt.

If dealers and collectors will still continue to offer sums of money which tempt the simple country folk to do wrong, it is not surprising that a dozen or more of our rarest species of birds are ceasing to build and breed in the country. If the present state of things continues, only a few years will need to pass and then some of the most charming birds which were once common will cease to be seen or heard in England. Is this not a thing to be averted?

In the event of Parliament declining to interfere, I would like to see our British ornithologists, and all other bird-lovers, combine to form a society for the protection of these rarer birds to which I refer. For an inconsiderable sum of money reliable watchers could be sent to the nesting grounds of at least twenty of the rarest species. If publicity was given to such a proposal, I am sure subscriptions would be

forthcoming from English naturalists and from private persons. Birds are quick in finding that they are protected, so that the good result would soon be seen. In the meantime, I appeal to all landowners, and bird-lovers throughout the country, to do what they can for the feathered species, and to remember that it is the birds which largely make the lanes, woods, and fields of this country of ours what they are. The charms of Nature will decline in proportion as the birds are diminished.

LITTLE TERN SITTING.

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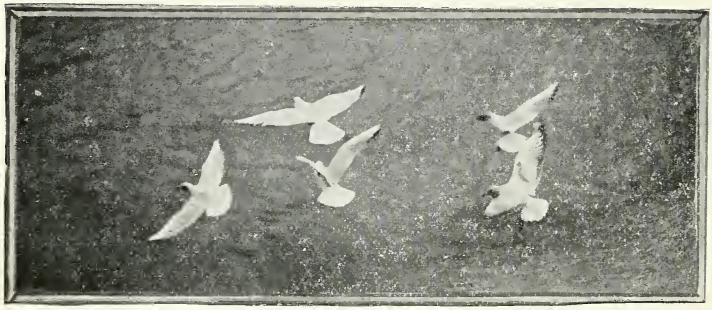

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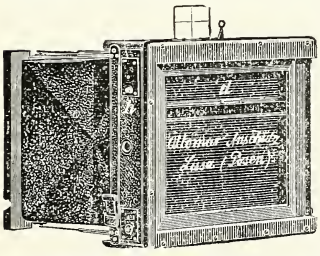

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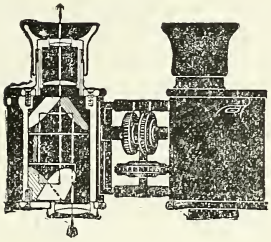

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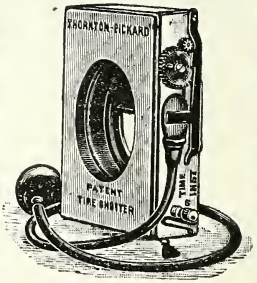

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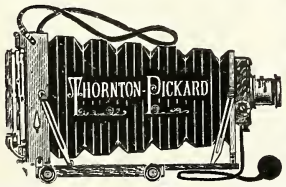

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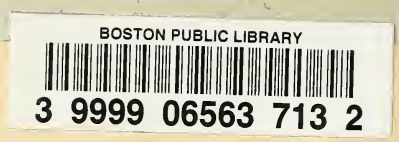

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